

A PASTORAL THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK  
FOR CARE AND COUNSELING WITH DIVORCED WOMEN  
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE KOREAN AMERICAN CHURCH

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School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

by  
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This Dissertation, written by

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## Abstract

### A Pastoral Theological Framework for Care and Counseling with Divorced Women in the Context of the Korean American Church

Pooreum Clara Chung

This dissertation is a study of Korean American Christian divorced women's post-divorce adjustment issues. As in American society at large, the number of divorced women in the Korean American church is increasing, but these women often receive inadequate care and support from the church. This neglect of their specific needs due to divorce leads many divorced women to feel unsuited for the church, and this impedes the process of recovery of their wholeness and well being. This dissertation provides a pastoral theological framework needed for understanding divorced women in the Korean American church context and providing to them adequate pastoral care and counseling.

My thesis is that qualitative research and analysis of interviews with Christian Korean American divorced women will yield data that can strengthen the capacity of pastors, congregations, and pastoral counselors to provide effective ministry in situations of divorce. Two research methods are employed: literature analysis and field research. In Chapter 2, I analyze literature relevant to the topic of Korean American Christian women's divorce. Chapters 3 and 4 describe and report the results of qualitative research carried out using grounded theory. Data was collected with fifteen participants through individual in-depth interviews in which fifteen divorced Korean American Christian women were asked to respond to the following themes: the effect of Korean traditional culture; faith and life in church; theological and biblical teachings of the church on divorce; post-divorce adjustment issues, and; the experience and understanding of

forgiveness and aloneness. Each interview was transcribed for analysis. Using the NVivo data analysis program, the concepts and themes were classified first into codes, and then categories and properties were derived from the coding: *Traditional Notions, Decision Making, Divorce and the Church, Biblical Understanding, Theological Understanding, Forgiveness, Aloneness, Post-Divorce Issues, and Positive Outcomes of Divorce*. The findings are analyzed in Chapter 5, using the hermeneutical perspectives of pastoral theology, including feminist and womanist analyses, and the psychotherapeutic framework of relational-cultural theory. I discuss and argue for a pastoral theological response adequate for the distinct experience and needs of Korean American Christian divorced women. A final chapter provides a summary of the dissertation, discussion of its limitations and contributions, and suggestions for future research.

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Working on this dissertation was a whole process in and of itself. I am aware that life will be a continuous learning, but I am at a point where I am concluding my long journey in the degree program as a student. How would I have ever guessed that the further you get in your program, the more help you need from others? I know so well that this is not through only my effort, but there are so many that I owe my accomplishments to.

My committee chair, my advisor, and my teacher, Dr. Kathleen J. Greider, you are the reason I chose to come to Claremont. You have shown me so well through our encounters how to do pastoral care with a student. Thank you for your serious dedication in doing pastoral theology, which I fully relied upon in my scholarly development with deep respect and trust. With your guidance I was able to think critically, but yet generously. I truly thank you for bringing out the pastoral scholar in me.

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One of the things I gained through this work is that I really got to love what I do. My love for pastoral theology grew even more. All the pastoral theological works I engaged with in my dissertation were so inspiring, nurturing, and caring. I have been nurtured and cared for myself. As I hope my work will do the same for others, I thank all those pastoral theologians for such inspiration.

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Mom and Dad, thank you for your endless encouragement and support. I know I could not be where I am today unless you had dreamed my dreams. You were the inspiration that started it all. Truly, thank you. My parents-in-law, I thank you for your support and endless prayers. I so much appreciate your encouragement not only to become a good daughter-in-law, but also a good person and a leader.

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feeling sadness when in despair, as well as relief when thriving. I cried when reporting your pains, but also felt overflowing joy when reporting your stories of overcoming the pain of divorce. I hope I did not misrepresent your words in any way. Because your voices were such a prominent and valuable part of my work, this dissertation is dedicated to you, the divorced women in Korean American churches, who, in the midst of insensitivity and ignorance, never cease to put their best effort into serving the church.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

My husband suddenly announced one day that he is leaving our family for another woman. However, he did not file for divorce immediately, not until two years after. I took that as a sign that he himself is debating whether to come back, that he did not want to officially end our marriage yet. When my ex-husband first told me he was leaving, I thought about my choices. I could either lose everything, or hold on to something that I could. I was losing my husband, but I didn't have to lose my faith in God altogether with him. So I decided to hold on to my faith. What I was going through felt like I was being soaked in rain, and I needed an umbrella, a spiritual umbrella, to keep me from being more wet. From that day on, I never missed one single Sunday. Looking back, I see that my faith has grown and matured a lot.

My church has a directory that contains member information, which is being revised every year. When it was a year after my husband left, my pastor insisted that they remove my husband's name from the directory since he had not returned to the family. We were not legally divorced yet, and the pastor was aware of the situation because I updated him every month with anything new. I said, "You may be right, pastor. But don't you care about what I think? You know that I have been praying for my husband's return. What if he sees the directory and notices that his name is gone? Wouldn't that stop him more from coming back? Does it matter greatly for the church whether his name is in the directory or not?" The pastor said it does make a great difference. I pleaded that they wouldn't make decisions based on the paper. I even insisted that if the pastor has a hard time talking to the directory committee, I myself will go and appeal to them about my personal situation and the need to keep my husband's name in the directory. He said not to do so. I asked him if he could keep my husband's name just a little longer, but he said all he could do was to put the name in parentheses, with an explanation on the bottom saying that this person in parentheses does not actually attend the church. I asked the pastor if he must do that. He said he does. So that year my husband's name appeared in the parentheses. I do not know what the church gains from all this, but my heart totally broke. I know the church did not want to intentionally give me a hard time, but why is such thing as erasing someone's name so important when I myself oppose this so strongly? I was not afraid of people's perception; whatever they said about my family, it didn't matter. I was concerned about my husband; moreover, my children who would be seeing their father's name erased from the family's list. Did they ever consider what a pain this is inflicting on our family?

#### Problem

These words from one of my interviewees introduce us to the problem dealt with in this dissertation. As in American society at large, the number of divorced women in

the Korean American church is increasing, but these women often receive inadequate care and support from the church. Divorced women surely exist in the church, but as seen in the vignette, their needs are often unrecognized and unaddressed. This neglect of their specific needs due to divorce leads many divorced women to feel unsuited for the church, which impedes the process of recovery of their wholeness and well-being. A pastoral theological framework is needed for understanding divorced women in the Korean American church context in order for the women to receive adequate pastoral care and counseling.

In the United States, the nuclear family has become the typical form of what is referred to as the “traditional family” since the late 1950s. It was naturally accepted that as a normal developmental task one should be married and start a family. The ideas of women getting out of the parental household and out of low-paying jobs from war time, as well as the media’s portrayal and idealization of the perfect family, could be some of the reasons that encouraged women and men to get married and to start a family.<sup>1</sup> As the traditional nuclear family became the norm, women who were divorced and lived alone were more likely to be stigmatized for not fitting into the norm. Although over time the concept of what constitutes a family and the image of divorced women has been modified to a certain extent, the concept of the traditional family from the 1950s is so fixed and idealized that it still leads to the thinking that living as a single woman is abnormal. As in the United States, Korea also is experiencing a large increase in the divorced population. In the Asia and Pacific Edition report of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), it is reported that “Korea’s divorce rate nearly

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Cargan, Being Single on Noah’s Ark (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 9.

quintupled between 1980 and 2004 (from 0.6 to 2.9), whereas average divorce rates have remained relatively low for 25 OECD countries (1.7 to 2.3 between 1980 and 2007).<sup>2</sup>

This report shows how rapidly Korea's divorce rate has increased over those decades. A 2008 report by Statistics Korea, a Korean national statistics office, shows how the divorce rate in Korea has increased over the years from 1995 to 2008, as shown in the graph in Figure 1, which is formed from this Statistics Korea report.



Figure 1. Divorce Rates in Korea

Also in Table 1, also from the report of Korean Statistics, the number of divorces increased to 124.072 in 2007, where in 2000 it was 119.455.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<b>Number of Divorces</b>	119.455	134.608	144.910	166.617	138.932	128.035	124.524	124.072	116.535
<b>Variations (%)</b>	1.7	12.7	7.7	15.0	-16.6	-7.8	-2.7	-0.4	-6.1

Table 1. Number of Divorces in Korea

<sup>2</sup> "Key Findings: Korea," OECD, Korean Policy Center, 2009, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/27/13/43465580.pdf> (accessed 17 Feb. 2010).



One interesting aspect of both Figure 1 and Table 1 is that they show the divorce rate and number as highest between 2003 and 2004, and since then the rate has been decreasing. This drop in the divorce rate could possibly be due to the government instituting required cooling-off period before divorce. The cooling-off period, a mandated time for up to 3 months from the initiation of the divorce procedure, first began in 2006 as a trial and was implemented in 2008. Since this cooling-off period was only mandated from 2008, it will require a few years to see whether this legal act really has an effect on lowering the number of divorces. However, even though the rapid growth of the divorce rate has ended and the recent numbers of divorces are decreasing, I believe it is still fair to say that Korea is dealing with a high population of divorced women since Figure 1 is showing growth of divorce rate overall.

Despite this change of divorce rates and numbers, Korea's social and cultural perceptions have not yet caught up with the trend. No matter how many marriages end in divorce, divorced women are still considered a relatively odd phenomenon, and Korean society at large is still in the process of adjusting to, and accepting, this surprising phenomenon. Therefore, divorced women in Korea encounter significant social and cultural rejection and stereotyping. Divorced women are stigmatized. In addition to being labeled as being needy and lonely, they are also perceived by the society as being responsible for breaking the family and disrupting the social order. They are seen to be selfish, wrong in their moral judgment, or even pathological. In Korean churches, it would not be wrong to say that divorced women are abandoned both pastorally and theologically. Furthermore, in recent research on the cultural consciousness of Korean

people, although it was reported that 56.8% of Christian respondents answered that divorce is acceptable under certain circumstances,<sup>3</sup> Korean churches are not responding to the change in their members' belief. In spite of divorce gradually becoming acceptable even to Christians, there seldom exists a ministry to meet divorced persons' needs and or a theology that acknowledges their divorced single status. Thus, social, cultural, and pastoral resources to change the perception and enhance understanding of divorced women are crucially needed.

There are several reasons that I am motivated to explore the topic of divorced women and the Korean American church. One of them is the fact that divorced women have generally received little attention. The loss of a loved one by divorce has been described as "psychological amputation."<sup>4</sup> To a phenomenon that is as painful as this, it is unreasonable that inadequate attention has been given to those suffering this loss. Therefore, this issue requires further examination, especially in the Korean American church, where the issue of divorce is unaddressed. There has been a lack of examination of the studies of those living as divorced women in recent years, including in the field of pastoral theology, but we should not conclude from this that there has been a significant improvement in divorced women's lives and thus the problem requires less attention from scholars. Although there has been a finding that being divorced is more acceptable today, that people spend more time living single over the course of their lives,<sup>5</sup> and that the

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<sup>3</sup> 한신대학교 학술원 신학연구소 [Theological Research Institute of Hanshin University], 한국인의 문화의식 조사 [Research on Cultural Consciousness of Korean People: Focus on the Changes of Family Culture] (Seoul, Korea: Hanul Books, 2005), 47.

<sup>4</sup> Charles William Stewart, "Counseling the Divorcee," Pastoral Psychology 14, no. 133 (1963): 13.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Cargan and Matthew Melko, Singles: Myths and Realities (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1982).

social and cultural acceptance and perception of divorced women is slowly improving in some contexts, problems and issues to be dealt with still remain. Thus, it may be possible to attribute the lack of research to social and cultural ignorance of the topic, or even to a state of denial of the phenomenon and experience of divorced women.

This topic is also chosen out of my theological orientation of paying attention to the those silenced. As an introvert myself, reserved and shy many times, I had to do quite an amount of self-reflection and self-examination in order to better assert and accept who I am. Being such a person as I am, I understand that quiet personalities have to gather more energy and strength to assert their opinions and to show their emotions. I apply this understanding to my theological view of the world and its people. I pay attention to the quiet ones, or the silenced ones in some cases. As I brought this theological understanding of mine to the church, I started being aware of who the quiet ones or the silenced ones are in the church. Out of many groups in the church, I started paying attention to the divorced women. I wanted to know why they are silenced, as well as what makes it difficult for them to show their emotions and assert their opinions.

Another reason this topic interests me is because of my clinical experience working with divorced women in individual and group counseling settings. I was exposed to the lives of first generation Korean American divorced women when I led a 10-week-long group for the divorced women in a Korean American church. This group experience led me to draw impressions about the status of Korean American divorced women. It is fair to say that divorced women in the Korean American church not only receive insufficient care but even feel abandoned. This does not mean that they do not receive care as individual parishioners, but when the church does not plan a specific

ministry regarding people's special context (in this case, divorce), and when there is blatant neglect (for example, not mentioning the word divorce from the pulpit), it is likely that divorced women feel disapproved of and ignored. When divorcees encounter the position of the church as disapproving of divorce, considering it to be theologically unlawful, they feel guilty and unsupported. Divorced women experience difficulty in finding a theology that is receptive and accepting of who they are. Although the church may disapprove of divorce, this does not mean its neglect of support and care for the divorcees can be legitimized.

My exposure to the lives of Korean American divorced women has enabled me to realize some of the issues that these women deal with, but I strongly feel the need to know more about their lives and their struggles. How do they adjust after divorce? How do the church's teachings on marriage and divorce affect them? How do they understand God in regards to their divorce? What role does forgiveness play in their lives? Not much is known about Korean American divorced women regarding their particular struggles within the church and the culture. The Korean American church has been ignorant of the issue of divorce, caring professionals have not paid much attention to it either, and there exists an insufficient amount of scholarly research and writing regarding this subject. Thus, this dissertation attempts to learn more by studying Korean American Christian divorced women. The findings of the study are reported in later chapters.

### Thesis

My thesis is that qualitative research and analysis of interviews with Christian Korean American divorced women will yield data that can strengthen the capacity of pastors, congregations, and pastoral counselors to provide effective ministry in situations

of divorce. By carefully studying the circumstances and contexts of first generation Korean American women who are divorced, an enhanced understanding for the church and for pastoral counseling practitioners can be shaped. Through adopting a grounded theory approach to qualitative research, I discuss Christian Korean American divorced women's experience regarding their post-divorce adjustment in the Korean tradition and in the Korean American church, dealing with Korean traditional notions, faith and life in church, theological and biblical teachings of the church on divorce, post-divorce adjustment issues, and how divorced women experience and understand aloneness.

Throughout the dissertation, divorced women's experience in the Korean American church is examined through the women's perspective. The divorced women's experience has been overshadowed by the dominant view, which has been the androcentric, marriage-oriented perspective. Under these circumstances the experience of women who are divorced has not been given adequate attention. Examining the issues of divorce through the eyes of women, taking into consideration the distinctiveness of each woman's experience, will better equip the church and the caregivers to hear and understand the concerns of divorced women. The divorced women's experience cannot be understood through a monolithic perspective; the underlying social and cultural issues need to be considered together.

### Method

I adopted two research methods for this research: literature analysis and field research. Literature relevant to the topic of Korean American Christian women's divorce was analyzed. For field research, I employed qualitative methodology. The use of qualitative method allows one to search for a deeper meaning and a more thorough

understanding of research participants' experiences. With qualitative research, subjectivity is valued and there is an attempt to understand and interpret reasons of certain context through semi-structured research methods. To the transcribed data from in-depth interviews, a grounded theory method was applied for analysis and conceptual understanding. The goal of this research was to obtain information from divorced Korean American women about their overall experience in the church as a divorced woman. This information was analyzed and used throughout the dissertation to develop a pastoral theological framework for pastoral care and counseling with divorced women in the Korean American church.

### Outline of Chapters

In this first chapter, the problem of care of divorced women in the Korean American church is presented. Also the importance of providing a pastoral theological framework for the divorced women of the Korean American church is explained. A statement of the thesis, along with a brief overview of the method for the research, intended audiences, definition of the terms, and its scope and limitations are presented. An outline of the chapters is also included.

In Chapter 2, a review of the current literature on the subject is presented. The literature review includes discussions of the morality of divorce and offers a pastoral theological perspective on the issue of divorce. The literature review also includes an understanding of post-divorce adjustment issues in Korean American and Korean contexts using the frameworks of gender and culture. In addition, literature on single women is reviewed. In these reviews, priority is given to examining the pastoral theological literature; however, due to the insufficient amount of literature on divorce

from the pastoral theological perspective, literature from some cognate fields, such as sociology, are adopted.

Chapter 3 presents a discussion of the dissertation's empirical research and hermeneutical methods. The chapter begins with a description of the research design. An in-depth interview method was used to understand the experience of Korean American divorced women. The interview was transcribed and the transcripts were analyzed using grounded theory method. Grounded theory methods move from the specific to the more general, identifying the key elements and categorizing the elements in the context that is being researched. In grounded theory methods, transcribed data are analyzed in four stages as codes, concepts, categories, and theory.<sup>6</sup> In this section, grounded theory and its relevance for this particular research is discussed. More detailed information about research question, data collection and analysis procedures, and participants are provided. The data collected and analyzed through grounded theory are then hermeneutically analyzed with feminist and womanist pastoral theological frameworks and Relational-Cultural Theory.

The results of the qualitative research are presented in Chapter 4. From the transcribed data, key points are marked with codes and grouped into similar concepts to be formed into categories. The following categories were derived from coded data: *Traditional Notions, Decision Making, Divorce and the Church, Biblical Understanding, Theological Understanding, Forgiveness, Aloneness, Post-Divorce Issues, and Positive Outcomes of Divorce*. Each category and its properties and sub-properties are supported with quotes from the transcribed and translated interview.

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<sup>6</sup> Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, The Discovery of Grounded Theory Strategies for Qualitative Research (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1967).

In Chapter 5, the data from the qualitative research is further analyzed and the emerging theory identified. Implications of the research for the theory and practice of pastoral theology are discussed in this chapter; i.e., what the caregivers and the church need to know and be aware of when providing pastoral care and counseling to Korean American divorced women.

The dissertation concludes with Chapter 6. A summary of the results and findings is offered. Limitations and contributions of the study are discussed, along with suggestions for future research.

### Definitions of Terms

*Pastoral Theology*: I use the term as an overarching concept including pastoral care and counseling. Pastoral theology refers specifically to the theological discipline that focuses on theories, practices, and methods of pastoral care and counseling. Pastoral theology begins with analysis of concrete human experience with the intent to offer a theological-grounded caring response to human situations.<sup>7</sup>

*Korean American Christian divorced women*: This is a term that is frequently used throughout the dissertation. Of special interest in the study are first generation Korean American women. Thus, by referring to Korean American divorced women, I focus particularly on first generation Korea-born Korean American immigrant women who are divorced. The term “Christian” used in regards to explaining Korean American divorced women refers to those who attend a Korean American Protestant church, regardless of denomination.

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<sup>7</sup> Nancy J. Ramsay, “Contemporary Pastoral Theology: A Wider Vision for the Practice of Love,” in Pastoral Care and Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms, ed. Nancy J. Ramsay (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2004), 157.



*Spirituality*: This term is used to refer to inner ability and aspiration that is within the person, which may or may not be related to a higher being. Pastoral theologian John Patton refers to spirituality as “whatever one does to orient one’s life toward the deepest reality.”<sup>8</sup> I agree with Patton and define it as being aware of such an inner and outer connection.

*Religion*: This term refers to one of the forms of spirituality. It is belief that is repeatedly practiced through an organized institution or a group.<sup>9</sup>

### Audience

My primary audience is the pastoral counselors who have the opportunity to encounter Korean American divorced women as their clients, either self-referred or referred by their pastors. This dissertation intends to provide an in-depth understanding of these clients to whom the pastoral counselors can offer an enriched therapeutic experience; it focuses on addressing the therapeutic issues that pastoral counselors, who have received training to attend to deeper psychological and spiritual issues, may encounter in their therapy.

However, although the primary audience is pastoral counselors, the other anticipated audience for this dissertation is composed of pastors and lay persons in churches. The church is not a building by itself, but is formed through the history and theological belief of each and every member. The church, as a whole, has tended to

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<sup>8</sup> John Patton, review of Spirituality for Our Global Community, by Daniel Helminiak, Journeys 2, no. 2 (2009): 29.

<sup>9</sup> This definition is based on Marsha Wiggins-Frame’s definition of religion. Marsha Wiggins-Frame, “Spirituality and Religion: Similarities and Differences,” in Integrating Spirituality and Religion Into Counseling: A Guide to Competent Practice, ed. Craig S. Cashwell and J. Scott Young (Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association, 2005), 13.

ignore the experiences of divorced women; therefore, this dissertation also addresses the congregational context. The dissertation will consider the theological beliefs and also the needs of the divorced women within the congregation. This dissertation aims to enhance the understanding of the clergy and congregation regarding the experiences of divorced women within the church, and it also hopes to provide pastoral theological understanding for the divorced women themselves.

### Scope and Limitations

This research is on the post-divorce adjustment of Korean American divorced women. There are a few points that need to be mentioned regarding the scope of this project. First, there are many dimensions that could be dealt with when dealing with Korean American divorced women, such as child-related issues, issues of sexuality, lifestyle, social perceptions, and issues related to immigration. Divorce also could be dealt with in regards to divorce prevention or divorce mediation. However, for the scope of this project, I have chosen to work with post-divorce adjustment issues from a pastoral theological perspective. The experience of Korean American divorced Christian women will be examined theologically and culturally. Second, this study focuses on heterosexual marriage and divorce rather than on lesbian and gay Korean couples. Unfortunately, the issue of lesbian and gay marriage is not yet discussed or surfaced in Korean or Korean American churches, so it is not dealt with in this research. Third, the scope of this research is on Korean American divorced women rather than men. As will be dealt with more in the next chapter, the Korean American church holds patriarchal culture within; thus, it is more likely for women than men to be stereotyped, stigmatized, and overlooked. The experiences of post-divorce adjustment may be the same for both

divorced women and men, but for this study divorced women's experience will be examined.

There are several limits to this study that need to be stated. There are limits in generalizing the findings from the qualitative research since the results may be unique to a first generation Korean American female divorced population. Thus, it is difficult to make any quantitative predictions. Next, there are limits to the context of this research. The research was done with Christian Korean American divorced women, but the geographical location had its limits since it was carried out only within the area of Southern California. There is a large Korean American community and many churches in this area, but only eleven churches and fifteen divorced women out of it were selected for this study. Lastly, I bring my own social and personal location as limits to this study. I am a Korean Presbyterian clergywoman pursuing her doctoral education as an international student. I am also a heterosexual married woman and mother without the experience of divorce. I acknowledge that my research may have been affected by my social and personal locations in ways of which I am not aware.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews selected literature on divorce. More specifically, since the concentration of this dissertation is on care that takes place post-divorce, rather than pre-divorce, the literature reviewed focuses on the period after the decision to divorce has been made and the legal act has been completed. There is literature on divorce prevention, helping the married couple to avoid facing the final decision to divorce, divorce mediation to minimize divorce trauma, and how to best assist and care for couples during the process of divorce. However, without underestimating its value, pre-divorce literature will not be dealt with here since the focus of this dissertation is on post-divorce adjustment.

Regarding this review some difficulties exist. It would be ideal to review the pastoral theological literature on divorced Korean American women in the Korean American churches. However, there is no pastoral theological literature that matches this exact theme; not one article or book was found. Two doctoral dissertations were written on a similar topic but, perhaps because they were both D. Min. projects,<sup>10</sup> they were focused on practical programs to be employed in church settings rather than elaborating on post-divorce adjustment issues or on pastoral counseling. Fortunately, although non-church-based and few in number,<sup>11</sup> literature on the Korean American women's post-

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<sup>10</sup> Won Seok Sim, An Effective Model of Church Ministry for Divorced Young Adults in Korea, D.Min. project, Claremont School of Theology, 2003 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 2003); Sung Ja Song Karry, "Recovering Ministry to the Divorced Women at Sarang Church" (D. Min. thesis., Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Janet Chang, a scholar of social work, points out how empirical studies on Korean immigrant divorce and post-divorce experiences are almost nonexistent, thus

divorce adjustment exists. These writings are the closest to the topic of my work and will be reviewed in a later part of this chapter.

In addition to the lack of relevant literature, another difficulty this review faces is the lack of discussion on divorce in the pastoral theological literature in general. In the field of theology at large, literature dealing with the issue of divorce does attempt to build a theological and foundational understanding of divorce itself. While a wide variety of theological work--from biblical interpretations of Scripture that deals with divorce to moral judgment for and against divorce--has been done in forming these theologies of divorce, it is unfortunate that the work done from a pastoral theological point of view exists in an insufficient amount. Overall, pastoral theological literature on divorce seems to be even less within the last two decades.<sup>12</sup> There is no clear explanation for why such a void exists.<sup>13</sup> Thus, while my primary effort is to review the recent literature dealing

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little is known about factors associated with post-divorce adjustment. See Janet Chang, "Self-Reported Reasons for Divorce and Correlates of Psychological Well-Being among Divorced Korean Immigrant Women," Journal of Divorce and Remarriage 40, no. 1 (2004): 114.

<sup>12</sup> It is reported that despite the high rate of divorce and its serious consequences, the mainline Protestant churches were slow in response. Wilcox W. Bradford reports that between 1980 and 1995 the number of articles just in the Christian Century shows only 5% of articles addressed family-related topics. Bradford also mentions that national church meetings of mainline denominations rarely dealt with issues of marriage and family. For more information, see, Wilcox W. Bradford, "Churches' Witness on the Family: Mixed Messages," Christian Century, February 2001, 16-19.

<sup>13</sup> Although the reasons for this void are unclear, one possible explanation comes from James G. Emerson, Jr. as he traces the Protestant perspective on divorce and remarriage. He argues that many denominations' constitutions slowly changed in the 1960s, giving the authority to govern remarriage of divorced persons to the local churches, and that is when inconsistency of rules and regulation took place, worsening the condition. With no system to regulate certain rules, and the local churches left to deal with this matter individually, a void of research and theological development resulted. See James G. Emerson, Jr., "Divorce and Remarriage: A Protestant Perspective," in The Family Handbook, ed. Herbert Anderson, Don S. Browning, Ian S. Evison, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 43.

with divorce in pastoral theology, due to its scarcity, I will review literature dating back to the 1960s. As mentioned above, non-church-based literature that is relevant to the topic of Korean American women's post-divorce adjustment will be discussed, along with some literature from the field of theology and writings on the subject by persons in the ministry.

### Morality of Divorce

The moral value of divorce is not the focal point of this dissertation, but I would like to address this topic in the beginning of this review for two reasons. First, while most literature does not contain any discussion of the moral element of divorce, some literature does offer clear opinion as to whether it is right or wrong, and within each position the writers are adamant. It will be important to discuss these two perspectives that seem to oppose one another. However, what is more important than to review these opposing perspectives is to examine what pastoral theology has to offer in this argument. Second, it is important that Korean Christianity considers and embraces a wider view of the morality of divorce. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this divorce phenomenon is something new for the Korean church. The Korean church, along with the Korean American church, may be confused as to how to understand, much less accept, this divorce epidemic that seems to oppose the church's religious belief, and how to provide support and care for the individual. Thus, in this section I will provide a review that will serve as a base for Korean churches to better process this divorce phenomenon.

On the one hand, there is the perspective that mainly opposes divorce, mostly on the biblical ground that to divorce is to break the marriage law. Couples that divorce, and especially individuals who remarry, are breaking the marriage law from God, and this is

seen as clearly wrong.<sup>14</sup> This argument mostly comes from the Scripture “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matt. 19:6b, NRSV). Ronald J. Nydam argues that Scripture tells us of the proclamation that God hates divorce and that Jesus reinforces this belief throughout his ministry. Nydam writes that God created marriage to be permanent, and he goes on to emphasize that Scripture repeatedly reports the condemnation of divorce. He reiterates Jesus’ point: “There is no guilt-free end to a marriage. Divorce and remarriage adulterate the marital covenant.”<sup>15</sup> Nydam strongly attacks divorce that is caused by adultery, stating: “In the act of writing off one wife and marrying/lying with another, the first covenant of marriage is adulterated. Divorce is wrong; it is an evil thing.”<sup>16</sup> Nydam has expressed it in strong words, but he is trying to make the point that divorce is not the way of God, and marriage is to be a permanent promise that should not be broken. He asks for a tougher ethic of the church in regards to divorce, to be not too quick to make decisions on divorce, but to focus on the redemptive possibility of the persons. His definition of a tougher ethic is about putting less emphasis on what makes divorce possible,<sup>17</sup> and stressing more the value of what is redemptive and forgivable in order to keep the promise of the covenant.

Nonetheless, he is not arguing for absolutely no divorce in all cases. He mentions the necessity of divorce, using Lewis Smedes’ words: because God “sometimes

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<sup>14</sup> Ronald J. Nydam, “The Messiness of Marriage and the Knottiness of Divorce: A Call for a Higher Theology and a Tougher Ethic,” Calvin Theological Journal 40, no. 2 (2005): 223.

<sup>15</sup> Nydam, 220.

<sup>16</sup> Nydam, 220.

<sup>17</sup> Based on Matthew 5:31-32, 19:3-12, adultery was understood to be an acceptable reason for divorce.

disapproves of the alternatives even more than (God) disapproves of divorce.”<sup>18</sup> Nydam claims that with a tougher ethic of divorce, it will be easier to discern when it is the right choice to leave. He writes: “when it is also judged that the destruction of staying in such a conflicted marriage is greater than the destruction of leaving it, only then may it be considered the correct decision.”<sup>19</sup> When ongoing abuse takes place and no effort is made by the abuser to try to restore the relationship, divorce should be filed in order to “salvage life.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, although the priority is given to keeping the marriage covenant, pressing for a tougher ethic will help to discern what is redemptive and what is not. In contrast to the common Christian understanding that Scripture considers adultery as the only legitimate reason to divorce, Nydam is actually arguing that relationships that are not redeemable, the ones which hinder life, should rather be considered as a reason for divorce.

Another response to divorce is viewing it as a failure and as a sin committed. These views are similar to the perspective discussed above that divorce overall is a breaking of the promise, yet it is distinctive in that it makes a direct connection of divorce to the issue of failure and sin. Divorce is portrayed as a failure to follow God’s marriage plan and thus sinning against God and the marriage partner, which, according to David Thompson, signifies a brokenness of communication and commitment.<sup>21</sup> Having the perspective that divorce is a failure inevitably links it to the issue of sin. Thompson

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<sup>18</sup> Lewis B. Smedes, “Divorce: An Ethical Response,” Reformed Journal, October 1976, 11; quoted in Nydam, 225.

<sup>19</sup> Nydam, 226.

<sup>20</sup> Nydam, 226.

<sup>21</sup> David A. Thompson, Counseling and Divorce, Resources for Christian Counseling, v.18 (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1989), 49.



states that “the real sin of divorce” is that of “covenant breaking.”<sup>22</sup> When the covenant is violated by the couple or by one of the partners, the relationship becomes difficult to mend and it may lead to the breaking up of the marriage. “Covenant breaking,” as Thompson explains, is not only the act of adultery, but it also includes having no Christian foundation in the marriage and engaging in recklessness or negligence of the relationship. He also argues that “divorce involves sin;” however, this sin is something that can be pardoned by God, and so the church needs to accept and care for those who divorce.<sup>23</sup>

There are other adamant voices regarding divorce. Divorce is explained as going against discipleship.<sup>24</sup> Won Ha Shin, Christian ethics scholar, argues that marriage is also to be accepted as a covenant and commitment which should not be taken lightly. In addition, marriage is understood as a way of discipleship, which means that whatever is required in becoming a disciple of Christ is also required in a marriage relationship. As it was asked to deny oneself and take up the cross in order to become a disciple, the same is expected in a marriage: commitment and sacrifice. Marriage should be built upon this commitment and sacrifice; thus, considering divorce is not only wrong but also not the way for the followers of Christ. Besides opposing discipleship, Hyuk Seung Kwon, Old Testament theologian, explains divorce as going against the will of God.<sup>25</sup> The illegitimacy of divorce is strongly voiced, arguing that when God brought a man and a woman sacredly into marriage, it was the will of God for it to be everlasting. However,

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<sup>22</sup> Thompson, 51.

<sup>23</sup> Thompson, 177.

<sup>24</sup> 신원하 [Won Ha Shin], “이혼은 제자도를 따르지 않는 것이다” [Divorce challenges discipleship], *Christian Thought*, May 2002, 32-45.

<sup>25</sup> 권혁승 [Hyuk Seung Kwon], “이혼은 하나님의 뜻이 아니다” [Divorce is not the will of God], *Christian Thought*, May 2002, 21-31.

divorce took place, breaking this sacred relationship, because of people's hardened hearts (Matt. 19: 8).

Despite these writers' adamant arguments against divorce, they are not ignorant of the fact that divorce takes place in the church. Although divorce in no case should be legitimated or even suggested, Kwon mentions that divorce should not be condemned as a sin that cannot ever be forgiven.<sup>26</sup> God does not approve of divorce, but Scripture acknowledges that divorce occurs, and when it does, the weak need to be protected. Kwon explains two texts that show how God is in protection of the weak.<sup>27</sup> In Deut. 24:1-4, when there is a divorce, the husband has to write a certificate of divorce for the wife before sending her away from his house. This act is understood not as recommending couples to divorce freely, but considering the context of the time, that women were in a totally powerless position, it is understood as a minor provision. This act of Moses is reiterated in Matt. 19:1-11 when Jesus is questioned by the Pharisees. This text is not about how God approves of divorce but about divorce being accepted when persisting in the marriage seems to do more harm than divorce.

Regarding this discussion of the perspectives that oppose divorce, the main focus is on how divorce is the breaking of a covenant and commitment; therefore divorce is portrayed as breaking a promise and failing to keep God's law, which leads to condemning divorce as a sin. The aspects of divorce as a challenge against discipleship and the will of God were also discussed. However, in spite of these strong oppositions against divorce, considerations for the divorced were not totally absent. Most of all, it was pointed out that the sin of breaking the covenant, the failure of obeying God's

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<sup>26</sup> Kwon, 31.

<sup>27</sup> Kwon, 21-31.

marriage law, can be pardoned. Although these positions mostly focused on keeping the commitment of marriage, exceptions were offered and divorce was accepted when the relationship was life-hindering and staying in the marriage did disservice to the parties.

A more supportive view of women's decision to divorce also exists. The Korean feminist perspective redefines what the sin is regarding divorce.<sup>28</sup> Divorced women are blamed from the society for not being good family caretakers in the Korean culture; moreover, they are considered to be sinners in the church. Traditionally, sin has been understood to be either the divorce itself or the act that brought about the divorce, which is mostly adultery in this regard.

Korean feminist theologian Young Sil Choi challenges this traditional view and examines the text from the women's point of view. Choi points out how different texts discuss the sin of abandoning one's wife under any circumstance. Passages in the books of Malachi 2:10-16 and Deuteronomy 22:13-16 and 24:1-4 specifically call men not to desert their wives, and this law specified the protection of the wife who otherwise would have been stoned to death, considering the social standing of women at the time. Teachings of Matthew 5:31-32 and 10:3-9 are a notification to the men and to the Pharisee who asks whether it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Jesus, in Matthew, emphasizes that male and female are joined together in God as one (19:6); therefore, the husband should not abandon the wife. These texts should not be read as setting a regulation for today's divorce, but rather should be read as teachings about how women who were socially and legally disempowered and low in their social status were protected by the law of God. On the basis of these Scriptures, the problem was not that divorce

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<sup>28</sup> 최영실 [Young Sil Choi], “성서는 ‘이혼’을 죄라고 말하는가?” [Does the Bible say “divorce” is sin?], Christian Thought, May 2002, 45-61.

was considered to be a sin or the divorced person a sinner, but that the divorced spouses were simply abandoned.<sup>29</sup> The focus of the Scriptures concerned with divorce is that of protecting the women who had no social status when they were to be divorced by their husbands. This view is not promoting or suggesting that people divorce. This examination of the Scripture redefines what sin is, and what the meaning of frequently quoted Scripture regarding divorce is.

Another perspective in support of divorce argues that even though divorce is frequently considered to be dissolution of the family, it should be accepted as an opportunity for women and a process of democratizing the family system.<sup>30</sup> Man Ja Choi, a Korean feminist theologian, asserts that the rate of divorce is increasing in Korean society and so the debate on whether it is right for one to divorce or not should no longer continue. As the number of divorced persons increase and their struggles can be witnessed more often, it is rather time to vigorously seek ways of adjustment after divorce. Choi sees divorce not as a crisis or a failure but rather as a new beginning. Divorce is mostly considered as a failure by those women who depend emotionally on their husband and children and who identify themselves only through their families. However, divorce can be considered a new beginning for these women who had previously identified themselves only as a caretaker for the family. If divorce could be understood as a new beginning, it could be an opportunity for women to reconstruct their lives democratically and as equals.

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<sup>29</sup> 최영실 [Young Sil Choi], 58.

<sup>30</sup> 최만자 [Man Ja Choi], “새로운 삶의 날개 달기: 이혼, 그 후의 새 삶을 향하여” [The new set of wings: divorce and life thereafter], Christian Thought, May 2002, 105-6.

Overall, the view that argues for the necessity of divorce in some situations is not pressing for a higher rate of divorce, but rather to reconsider what has been taught in the church: that divorce is a sin. This supportive perspective emphasizes that it is not Jesus who put this burden of sin on us, but the “misguided theologians.”<sup>31</sup> As all accounts of human failure in the Scriptures have been pardoned and healed by grace, then it is seen as only natural and right that divorce not be condemned but reflect God’s forgiveness and healing power.<sup>32</sup>

Whether supportive of divorce or not, each position relies on how divorce is understood and defined. One perspective understands divorce as a failure, failing to keep the covenant, in which divorce is understood as a sin. The other understands divorce as a new beginning and liberation from traditional roles. This second position takes the social context into consideration, looking into the texts with a lens that is more sensitive to the poor and the weak, and examines sin not as the divorce itself but as the abandonment of the weak and the poor. These two perspectives differ in their positioning of divorce regarding sin, but they also have commonality in supporting and caring for the divorced. Whether they define divorced ones as sinners or not, the caring aspect is present in both of these viewpoints. In all the literature, it was mentioned in both areas that one certain understanding of divorce cannot be rigidly applied to all cases. Divorce was flexibly permitted to couples where the relationship was life-hindering, doing more harm than good. Also both perspectives emphasized the caring aspect by focusing on the theology

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<sup>31</sup> Rubel Shelly, Divorce and Remarriage: A Redemptive Theology (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2007), 37.

<sup>32</sup> Shelly, 37.

of forgiveness. Whether divorce is a sin or not, the loving and pardoning aspect of Christianity is to be illuminated in the church.

### Divorce and the Church

Regarding the discussion of whether divorce can be supported and justified or condemned, pastoral theological response needs to be examined. As already mentioned, an insufficient amount of literature exists, but each source contributes a valuable point to the discussion. The most important illumination of the pastoral theological perspective regarding divorce is that it removes itself from the direct debate of whether divorce is right or wrong. Rather, it positions itself as taking into consideration the whole phenomenon of divorce in the church and actively seeking to focus on the caring aspect of pastoral theology.

Wayne E. Oates contributes a valuable thought as to what the role of the church is. He points out that the struggles the divorced person faces are not an individual problem, but concern the whole group. Oates states, “The *divorced Christian* is a symptom of the irresponsibility of the church as a *teaching* community and its failure of nerve as a fellowship of human suffering.”<sup>33</sup> He argues that the church has not only failed in supporting and guiding Christians before and after divorce, but that it has attributed all the responsibilities and suffering associated with divorce only to the divorced individual. However, if divorce is a failure, it is not only the divorced person’s failure; if divorce is a sin that needs to be condemned, it is not only the divorced person that needs to be condemned; the responsibility and the weight of divorce should be attributed to the church as a whole. Oates writes:

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<sup>33</sup> Wayne E. Oates, Pastoral Counseling in Social Problems: Extremism, Race, Sex, Divorce (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1966), 107.

No one is to blame, but everyone is responsible. Thus guilt is not simply bypassed; it is distributed. The church and its ministry share corporately in the sin. The lack of premarital confrontation and counseling, the lack of pastoral follow-up of the couple after marriage, the absence of communication when the marriage began to founder, and the loss of rapport when the separation came – all these are a shared responsibility between the church and the divorce.<sup>34</sup>

His point is crucial in that it clearly shows how neglectful the church has been and also helps to transfer our perspective to one of being mutually responsible for the struggles and the pain of the divorced persons. The church needs to reconsider the issue of divorce from a mutual point of view and share any responsibilities and burdens communally. This may be done through either care ministry or educational ministry. It is important that the church does not neglect the role it needs to play and the burden it needs to share in caring for divorced persons.

Other views exist that are positioned away from the churches' inner debate of the pros and cons of divorce; they move the focus to the actual people that are affected. As in the argument of Oates, William B. Oglesby also refers to the communal responsibility of the church regarding the effects of divorce. He says the failure of divorce is in the same way a failure of the church and points out the tendency that exists in the church to dichotomize its response to those who are divorced, e.g., between forgiveness and condemnation, judgment and restoration.<sup>35</sup> He writes:

What is required, rather, is to face the reality of what has been and is happening and to move through it toward reconciliation of the persons even though this may not result in their remaining married.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Oates, 119-20.

<sup>35</sup> William B. Oglesby, "Divorce and Remarriage in Christian Perspective," Pastoral Psychology 25, no. 4 (1977): 284, 285.

<sup>36</sup> Oglesby, 285.

Oglesby is firm in his belief that “persons are more important than institutions.”<sup>37</sup> He states that, contrary to this belief, the church has been ambivalent in its response by delaying its support and care of the ones affected by divorce. Simply recognizing their presence is not enough. What is crucial is not the discernment of whether divorce is right or wrong; rather, the focus should be on the persons directly affected, nurturing and caring for them through their struggles.

John H. Patton offers a valuable perspective in this discussion of how to understand divorce from a pastoral theological stance. He specifically refers to the word *pastoral* and says pastoral care means “being with things as they are.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, the current divorce phenomenon may not be completely understandable, acceptable, or agreeable; however, to be *pastoral* means to be with the persons where they are, how they are, feeling with and caring for them. Rather than being ambivalent or avoidant, according to Patton, the church needs to study the situation of divorce in order to provide a more intelligent and useful presence in the midst of all the struggles.

Korean pastoral theologian Suk Mo Ahn also asserts that churches have been ignorant of the issue of divorce and have been neglectful of divorced persons.<sup>39</sup> He emphasizes the need for the church to shift its perspective from avoidance and neglect to focus on those in need of support and care. Many people want a strong marriage and want to live happily in it; however, this is not always a reality. Ahn reminds us that for most couples divorce is thoroughly thought through by the parties before the final

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<sup>37</sup> Oglesby, 287.

<sup>38</sup> John H. Patton, “Being with Things as They Are,” Journal of Pastoral Care 37, no. 4 (December 1983): 242.

<sup>39</sup> 안석모 [Suk Mo Ahn], “이혼 가정을 교회는 어떻게 돌보아야 하나?” [How Should the Church Care for Divorce Families?], Christian Thought, May 2002, 94.



decision is made and is chosen as the last resort.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Christians who are in an abusive marriage sometimes even put themselves in physical danger just so they can avoid divorce. But if one resides in an abusive relationship they may avoid getting a divorce; however, it could be physically dangerous and life risking. Taking these facts into consideration, the decision of the persons who divorce as a last resort should be respected rather than criticized. Ahn argues that, just as Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27); marriage also was made for persons, not persons for marriage. The church should shift its perspective in its view of divorce and realize that divorce inevitably happens to some people, and that it may even be a safer outlet at times than a troubled marriage.

This section has reviewed the pastoral theological responses regarding divorce and its care. Oates pointed out how the church should be able to move through the ambiguity and the dilemma that divorce presents in order to share the burdens of the divorced individuals and accompany them in their sufferings. Oglesby urged the church to stop dichotomizing and move forward in caring for the divorced. Patton emphasized the *pastoral* aspect of being with people where they are, and Ahn affirmed the decision of divorce as a process that is thoroughly thought through. What has been mainly discussed here as being required is the shift of perspective from the debate of right or wrong to the care of the divorced persons. All these perspectives have in common the critique that the church has been neglectful of its pastoral role and should focus more on the nurturing and caring aspect, shifting its focus from the narrow view of the pros and cons of divorce and

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<sup>40</sup> Ahn, 94.

rather take a broader view of divorce to see the actual people that are affected and provide care for them that is *pastoral* and supportive.

### Korean American Women and Divorce

This section of the literature review will focus on Korean American women's divorce and their adjustment. The current state of Korean American women's divorce will be examined, followed by factors that are associated with the divorce. Next, the issues regarding Korean American divorcees' adjustment will be discussed, leading to a review of some church-related issues regarding adjustment to divorce. Below, I introduce a story in the beginning of this section. It is shared by a divorcee from one of the interviews. The reason this story is shared here is because it shows well the patriarchal aspect that proscribes the relationship of a husband and a wife, even when they are divorced.

I divorced my ex-husband after three years of abusive marriage. We have two children from the marriage. I raised the kids and there were minimal contacts between the kids and their dad. At one point he decided that he would not see our children anymore. But, when my daughter was getting married, I contacted him and asked him to come to the dinner where the bride's and groom's parents were meeting together. That was when he hadn't seen his children for a long time, and also he was having a hard time after his third marriage failed. He got pretty upset at that dinner table because he thought I was ignoring him. He wanted to pay for the dinner, but instead of letting him pay, I just paid for the whole thing myself. In a way, I guess I wanted to show him that I am doing well without him, both having a job and raising the kids. I think this hurt my ex-husband's pride. Moreover, my daughter refused to have her dad walk her in at the wedding. She said her dad was never around for her, and just because he is her dad doesn't make it obvious that he gets to walk her in. I think he also was offended by this, too. I persuaded my daughter and even made an opportunity to meet together with her dad, but things didn't go well; my daughter was firm with her decision. When I met him days before the wedding, I also said, "I will let you sit on the father's side during the ceremony," which I believe also offended him. So, he called me the night before the wedding, heavily drunken, and started yelling and cursing at me, telling me how much I offended him. I was driving then, but I pulled over and listened to all that he had to say. I told him that I was sorry and asked him to please come to his daughter's wedding. I couldn't sleep that night,

so I just went to church and stayed up all night praying, the night before my daughter's wedding.

Siyon Rhee, a scholar in the field of social work, researched separation and divorce among Korean immigrant families.<sup>41</sup> She mentions that until the beginning of the twentieth century, divorce was primarily initiated by the husband or the husband's family; the main reasons, such as the wife's failure to produce a son or to serve her in-laws, were "socially sanctioned" reasons. These are Confucian beliefs that provided a conceptual base for seeing women as inferior and for oppressing them in a patriarchal society.<sup>42</sup> From this influence that is embedded in the Korean culture, Korean families still mostly portray a form of male dominance up to this day; however, Korean society has rapidly changed and Korean women's social and economic status has generally improved. Rhee points out that traditionally for Korean women, divorce was something unacceptable, as it brought shame to the person and disgrace to the family; however, Korean women being more educated, gaining more economic independence, growing more individualized, and also obtaining self-actualization, may have weakened traditional values and contributed to the rising rate of divorce in Korea.<sup>43</sup>

Rhee reports that, due to the low rates of marital dissolution before, there was an unrealistic assumption that Asian American families generally are relatively stable and cohesive, but the divorce rate for some Asian Americans, such as Korean Americans, has

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<sup>41</sup> Siyon Rhee, "Separation and Divorce among Korean Immigrant Families," in Korean American Women: From Tradition to Modern Feminism, ed. Young I. Song and Ailee Moon (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 152.

<sup>42</sup> Confucianism began spreading its influence in the Korean society from the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century, and although it is no longer a widely honored religion, the influence and consequence of this belief is deeply embedded in the Korean culture.

<sup>43</sup> Rhee, 152.

become one of the highest among various ethnic groups.<sup>44</sup> Janet Chang, a social work scholar, confirms Rhee's report through her research with 73 divorced Korean American women. These studies report that the Korean American divorce rate exceeds that of Chinese Americans and Filipino Americans; furthermore, she has found that Korean Americans' divorce rate is higher than that of Koreans in Korea.<sup>45</sup>

Several studies commonly show that a few factors among Korean American families may be associated with this high divorce rate. The first factor is that of role change. A study done on Korean American marriages by the Korean Churches for Community Development (KCCD) explains that, due to the traditional patriarchal hierarchy, a linear power relationship within the family exists.<sup>46</sup> Under the influence of westernization and modernization, this family system has waned over the years, but the influence is still prevalent in Korean American families. Rhee points out that the traditional role of wives as homemakers is changing as they enter the labor market.<sup>47</sup> This brings up multiple issues, the most significant of which is that, as women gain some financial independence, and some confidence through this independence, they do not have to depend on their husbands as much. As for the husband, according to Chang's studies, when the wife gains financial independence and seems to be more assertive, he tends to feel insecure and has difficulty adjusting to the role change because he feels his

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<sup>44</sup> Rhee, 151. Rhee records that, according to the 2000 U. S. Census, Korean Americans' divorce rate (5.3%) exceeds Chinese Americans (4.0%) and Filipino Americans (5.0%).

<sup>45</sup> Chang, "Self-Reported Reasons for Divorce and Correlates of Psychological Well-Being among Divorced Korean Immigrant Women," 114.

<sup>46</sup> Rebecca Y. Kim and Hyepin Im. "The State of Korean American Marriages" (Los Angeles, CA: Korean Churches for Community Development, 2008), 13-14.

<sup>47</sup> Rhee, 156.

patriarchal authority is being threatened.<sup>48</sup> The husband is used to the patriarch role and so the wife is expected to be the homemaker even while she is working full-time outside the house. Chang points out that women are overworked and are fatigued by the dual role they are required to play.<sup>49</sup> Thus, it is almost inevitable that marital problems arise from the challenge and resistance to the traditional role.

Another common factor that is associated with the Korean American families' divorce is the high rate of wife battery. Rhee shows that the rate of domestic violence in Korean immigrant families is the highest among Asian groups residing in the Los Angeles area.<sup>50</sup> In Korean American families, the awareness of domestic violence is obscure and sometimes even absent. As in one of the above mentioned reports, Korean men, rooted in their patriarchal hierarchy system, think it is acceptable and normal to yell at their wives and call them derogatory names.<sup>51</sup> For them it is normal because they think it is not a severe battering. Rhee also explains that, according to the report of the Korean American Family Service Center in Los Angeles, most women who experienced physical violence have considered divorce seriously and attempted to receive legal consultation regarding divorce.<sup>52</sup>

Besides the complicated relationship between patriarchal gender role ideology and women's financial independence, and the high rate of domestic violence in Korean families, there are some other factors Rhee cites that may contribute to divorce.<sup>53</sup> One of

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<sup>48</sup> Janet C. Chang, Korean Immigrant Women's Post Divorce Adjustment, Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1998 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1998), 38.

<sup>49</sup> Chang, Korean Immigrant Women's Post Divorce Adjustment, 37.

<sup>50</sup> Rhee, 157.

<sup>51</sup> Kim and Im, 14.

<sup>52</sup> Rhee, 157.

<sup>53</sup> Rhee, 157.

them is that due to no-fault divorce policy, divorce is relatively less complicated to obtain in the United States as compared to Korea. Also, women are less stigmatized by divorce here in the United States, not only because divorce is accepted with a less stigmatized view by the mainstream society, but also because there exists less legal discrimination.<sup>54</sup> Rhee refers to the principle of community property and favorable treatment for women in granting child-rearing rights, which allows women to feel safer in initiating divorce.

Regarding the issue of post-divorce adjustment, however, Chang reports that Korean immigrant women's post-divorce life does not appear to be promising.<sup>55</sup> In addition to all the issues that non-immigrant divorced women may be facing, the Korean immigrant woman also faces a number of challenges: the pressure to acculturate; a lack of English skills; unfamiliarity with the American legal and social service systems, and; a lack of a social support network.<sup>56</sup> Economic difficulty is another major factor that makes post-divorce adjustment a struggle. Most research indicates that there is a significant decline in economic status and living standards when women divorce.<sup>57</sup> As women of color, Korean immigrant women may experience greater economic hardship. Post-divorce adjustment is difficult for any divorcee, but immigrant women have extra challenges.

Besides these common post-divorce experiences, there are additional factors that need to be considered in regards to Korean American women's post-divorce adjustment.

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<sup>54</sup> Chang, Korean Immigrant Women's Post Divorce Adjustment, 39; Rhee, 157.

<sup>55</sup> Chang, Korean Immigrant Women's Post Divorce Adjustment, 39.

<sup>56</sup> Chang, Korean Immigrant Women's Post Divorce Adjustment, 39; "Self-Reported Reasons for Divorce and Correlates of Psychological Well-Being among Divorced Korean Immigrant Women," 125.

<sup>57</sup> Chang, "Self-Reported Reasons for Divorce and Correlates of Psychological Well-Being Among Divorced Korean Immigrant Women," 113.

In Rhee's studies, J. L. Tien's research on divorce adjustment across cultures is introduced. Tien investigated divorce adjustment among Anglo, Chinese, and Korean Americans and found that, while Anglo and Chinese Americans often considered divorce as something positive, Korean Americans were more likely to indicate having negative feelings after divorce, such as anger, shame, regret and confusion.<sup>58</sup> These findings indicate that Korean American divorcees' post-divorce adjustment issues need to be examined and understood their distinctive, unique cultural aspects.

The reasons for divorce need to be taken into consideration when looking at the difficulties of Korean American divorcees' post-divorce adjustment. It was mentioned before that the Korean American domestic violence rate is the highest among all Asian groups, and was often a factor associated with divorce. According to Chang's research, women whose divorces were caused by physical and psychological abuse and extramarital affairs experienced a more difficult post-divorce adjustment than those who divorced for other reasons.<sup>59</sup> Chang also reports that because of these abusive experiences, Korean divorced women still have strong negative feelings about their ex-husbands.<sup>60</sup> Thus, physical and psychological abusive experience often impedes Korean divorced women's adjustment process.

Furthermore, the social stigma that is attached to divorcees needs to be considered in understanding Korean American divorcees.

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<sup>58</sup> Rhee, 157-58.

<sup>59</sup> Chang, "Self-Reported Reasons for Divorce and Correlates of Psychological Well-Being Among Divorced Korean Immigrant Women," 124; Chang, Korean Immigrant Women's Post Divorce Adjustment, 39.

<sup>60</sup> Janet Chang, "Married and Divorced Korean Immigrant Women: A Report on Their Psychological Well-Being," Amerasia Journal 30, no. 1 (2004): 83.

Two mothers were having a conversation during their church's fellowship time. They were talking about their children who recently went back to college after their winter break. The conversation carried on and they began to talk about what the qualifications of their children's future spouses should be. One mother said there are two things that she always emphasizes to her children; one is that their future spouse should be a Christian; and the other is that they should not come from a divorced family. The other mother who was listening agreed, adding that kids from divorced families seemed to have more problems than others. She said that she knows why that is the case; it is because the children who were raised under a divorced mother did not receive enough attention, since the divorced mothers were too busy and self-centered, taking care of themselves first.

This is an actual conversation that took place in the Korean American church where I myself was present in the group during this conversation. As can be seen, divorcees are portrayed as being self-centered women, who do not pay enough attention to raising their children. The children raised under single mothers are also stereotyped as having more problems than those who are living with both of their parents. Chang points out that there exists a strong stigma or prejudicial attitude toward divorced women.<sup>61</sup> The divorced woman is stigmatized as failing to be a good wife and a mother. Limiting women's socialization to the role of mother and wife as the ideal female goal is still prevalent in Korean culture<sup>62</sup>; thus, divorced women are perceived as those who not only fail to fulfill this ideal female goal, but also as those who rejected the goal. The divorced woman sometimes even receives negative judgment from her own family members, even if she has been abused, since she is perceived to have brought shame to them. A general social perception of divorced women is negative, in which they are often times held solely responsible for the divorce.

Under these circumstances, divorced women are psychologically distressed.

Chang's studies show that feelings of loneliness and anger, a sense of failure and

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<sup>61</sup> Chang, Korean Immigrant Women's Post Divorce Adjustment, 39.

<sup>62</sup> Chang, Korean Immigrant Women's Post Divorce Adjustment, 39.



inferiority, lack of trust in people, and worries about the future are frequent symptoms reported by many divorced women.<sup>63</sup> Chang's findings also show that divorcees feel unease when dealing with people who do not know of their divorce, as well as when people belittle or look down on them because of their divorced status. There is a high level of psychological distress among Korean immigrant divorced women, which indicates a need for mental health intervention; however, along with the financial difficulties that divorced women often face in regards to health insurance, there is the traditional notion that mental health services are only for "crazy" people.<sup>64</sup> Chang also mentions that already-stigmatized divorcees hesitate to seek psychological help since they do not want to be further shamed. Social stigma and lack of psychological help leave Korean American divorcees isolated. Chang's findings show that Korean immigrant divorcees list emotional support as another most-needed type of support.<sup>65</sup> Thus, Korean American divorced women's psychological distress, hesitancy in seeking mental health intervention, and need for emotional support should be considered in understanding their post-divorce adjustment.

In regards to how Korean immigrant divorcees receive their emotional support, a few studies indicate that their church and their pastors are their resources. Chang's studies reveal the psychological distress encountered by Korean immigrant women after divorce and their coping strategies. She indicates that the majority of divorced women in

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<sup>63</sup> Chang, "Married and Divorced Korean Immigrant Women: A Report on Their Psychological Well-Being," 83; Chang, Korean Immigrant Women's Post Divorce Adjustment, 142.

<sup>64</sup> Chang, "Married and Divorced Korean Immigrant Women: A Report on Their Psychological Well-Being," 84.

<sup>65</sup> Two most-needed areas of help were the financial support and child care. See Chang, Korean Immigrant Women's Post Divorce Adjustment, 90.

her studies were church-goers and that one major coping strategy for their emotional difficulty was to rely on their religion and pray to God.<sup>66</sup> Thus, Chang suggests that one realistic alternative to professional mental health intervention is to receive assistance from the Korean American church ministers.<sup>67</sup> Kim and Im's report also mentions the importance of partnering with Korean churches and pastors. They write:

Among post-1965 immigrants, Koreans demonstrate the highest percentage of Protestant affiliation – over 70% of Koreans attend church weekly. The Korean church is the heart of the Korean American community. Thus, partnering with churches is essential.<sup>68</sup>

Kim and Im emphasize the importance of getting pastors on board to provide marriage training and resources for their congregants. According to Chang, Korean American church pastors often play the role of counselor for the individual and the family, so if pastors could increase their sensitivity and knowledge on various issues, they could be a rich resource. However, Chang also raises questions regarding Korean ministers as mental health providers, since the majority of Korean immigrant pastors identify themselves as conservative and traditional.

Church is a vital part of the life of Korean American divorced women who are immigrants, in spite of its being a deeply male-centered institution. To Korean American immigrants, the church is more than simply a religious community. As sociologist Won Moo Hurh describes, “(The) Korean ethnic church has become the center of the Korean American community by providing not only spiritual (Christian) fellowship but also

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<sup>66</sup> Chang, *Korean Immigrant Women's Post Divorce Adjustment*, 143; “Self-Reported Reasons for Divorce and Correlates of Psychological Well-Being among Divorced Korean Immigrant Women,” 126.

<sup>67</sup> Chang, “Married and Divorced Korean Immigrant Women,” 84.

<sup>68</sup> Kim and Im, 56-57.

ethnic fellowship, cultural identity, and social services.”<sup>69</sup> Church provides spiritual fellowship, psychological comfort through communal bonding, and also plays a function of social services. Hence, according to Hurh, “church participation has become a way of life”<sup>70</sup> for Korean Americans, and this could be equally applied to Korean American divorced women. The church is an important part of Korean American divorced women’s lives; nevertheless, sociologist Jung Ha Kim, through her research with Korean American church women, points out that “the Korean American church in general is a deeply gendered organization where unequal power and privileges between women and men are reinforced, legitimated, and maintained with religious fervor.”<sup>71</sup> She explains that the androcentric theme of Christianity and patriarchal structure and theology has brought denigrating consequences for women.<sup>72</sup> Korean American women in the Korean American churches deal with these gendered and unequal aspects of the church. To this already deeply gendered institution, the stigma of divorce is reinforced to divorced women by stereotyping them through the androcentric theology and patriarchal culture.

So far, the Korean American divorced women and their post-divorce adjustment has been reviewed, citing a few factors such as: women’s financial independence; high rate of domestic violence, and; the U. S. culture of less stigmatization of divorcees as compared to Korea. These are factors that may be associated with the high number of Korean American women who divorce. In regards to their adjustment, the difficulty of adjustment after domestic violence should be considered together. Additionally, the

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<sup>69</sup> Won Moo Hurh, The Korean Americans (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 106.

<sup>70</sup> Hurh, 107.

<sup>71</sup> Jung Ha Kim, Bridge-Makers and Cross-Bearers: Korean-American Women and the Church (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 124.

<sup>72</sup> Jung Ha Kim, 124.

strong stigma or prejudicial attitudes toward divorced women in Korean American community was a factor that made the post-divorce adjustment difficult. Divorcees often deal with psychological issues that require mental health intervention, but due to lack of information and fear of being stigmatized again, they often do not seek these services as much. Korean American churches and their pastors were mentioned as possible resources since divorcees often relied on religion and their church as a coping strategy. Church plays an important role in the life of Korean American divorced women; however, it was pointed out that there also exists a danger of divorcees being further stigmatized and stereotyped in the church, since the Korean American church manifests an androcentric theology and patriarchal culture.

#### Divorced Single Women

This section reviews studies of divorced women living single. “Single women” is a broader term that includes all women that are unmarried and living single--by choice, or by being widowed or divorced. The reason I include the broader context of single women is because divorcees are often viewed and grouped as single women in our society, especially in the churches. Also, examining the aspects of single women’s life teaches us more about the experience of divorcees living as single persons. Divorcees living single will be defined briefly, followed by the theology of living single; lastly, the aspect of aloneness will be examined.

#### Defining Living Single

Today’s society and culture focuses mainly on living as a couple, that is, a married heterosexual couple. Although more people have learned to better accept the culture of living single than before, it is still at a level where singles often experience

special unwanted attention or isolation and exclusion. Being single is commonly translated directly as a transitional phase that one is moving through towards marriage.<sup>73</sup> Singlehood is understood in regards to either marriage or absence of marriage; the cultural and social perception is that singles are somehow incomplete, as defined through marriage and family. Different studies have pointed out that the family-oriented community is accepted as the norm of the society, and since women's social and economic power has been limited, it is also mentioned how women's status has been defined through their spouse.<sup>74</sup> Thus, in this culture where singles are not only defined but also stereotyped through the lens of the married world, any individual without the status of marriage is likely to be left in the undefined territory where no legitimate social role can be applied. Natalie Schwartzberg, Kathy Berliner, and Demaris Jacob, in their studies, elaborate how society and culture label and stereotype those who are living single.<sup>75</sup> Though singles are perceived to have more freedom in their use of time, there also widely exists a negative way of referring to those living single. There is the perception that singles are irresponsible, selfish, or even pathological.<sup>76</sup> Singles are understood to be deviant, immature, and lonely.<sup>77</sup> By these stereotypes, singles are socially and culturally assigned images that may or may not explain who they are.

The divorce rate had been steady until the 1960s in the United States, but since then the rate has been rapidly increasing. Although the findings confirm that women

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<sup>73</sup> Natalie Schwartzberg, Kathy Berliner, and Demaris Jacob, Single in a Married World: A Life Cycle Framework for Working with the Unmarried Adult (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 6.

<sup>74</sup> Schwartzberg et al., 6.

<sup>75</sup> Schwartzberg et al., 6.

<sup>76</sup> Schwartzberg et al., 6.

<sup>77</sup> Leonard Cargan, Being Single on Noah's Ark, 9.

usually do better emotionally than men after divorce, there is a higher chance that women will experience rapid income and expense changes that affect their personal finances negatively.<sup>78</sup> Divorced women are often portrayed as being needy, lonely, and cynical about the future of other marriages.<sup>79</sup> Although this may be true of some women at times, to generalize this as the image of divorced women is stereotyping. Divorced women generally should not be stereotyped as needy, lonely, or cynical about others' relationships. Rather, they need to be understood as needing support, community, and the chance to revisit their own relationship in order to process any remaining issues, such as anger and grief.

### Theology of Living Single

As societies stereotype women who are single, the church and its theology often reflect the same perspective. With a growing number of singles, there is also a growing number of singles in the church. It should not be a matter of whether you are a single or not to feel a sense of belonging to God and the church community; but unfortunately, it often is the case that singles do not find comfort and acceptance of who they are within the church. The church and its theology fail to provide acceptance for single women; many have felt confusion between their faith in God and the church's reaction, and thus have felt that they no longer belong to the church. The church may not have shunned single women, but it has failed to provide an inclusive environment and adequate theology for them.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Cargan, Being Single on Noah's Ark, 44.

<sup>79</sup> Barna Research Group, UnMarried America: How Singles Are Changing and What It Means for the Church (Glendale, CA: Barna Research Group, 1993), 22.

<sup>80</sup> Books on singles and the church often have such titles as, "Single Adults Want to Be the Church, Too" or "Reach Out to Singles," which partly reflects that this

There are numerous Scriptures that are referred to that further stigmatize single women in the church, but out of them all, the theology that churches are grounded on the most is the understanding that human beings are created to be together through marriage. The most frequently used Scripture for this is the passage in Genesis: “It is not good for the man to be alone” (NRSV, Gen. 2:18). This text is interpreted and understood to provide legitimacy of marriage for all. It has been biblically supported that one ought to be married and not remain single. Carolyn Koons and Michael Anthony make the point that this passage has been the source of confusion and pain for singles who are told they are “incomplete” without a mate.<sup>81</sup> It has been an affirmation of the will of God that it is “not good” to “be alone.” Another passage that is used to ratify how human beings are created to be together is the story of Noah and the ark: “You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you” (NRSV, Gen. 3:19). This passage seems to confirm that even in the days of Noah it was a couple-oriented society, and God was willing to establish a covenant and bless those in twos. Thus, the belief that humans are created to be together through marriage has dominated Christian theology.

These stories need to be revisited. First of all, the creation story, as mentioned above, was not meant to emphasize marriage; rather it was to emphasize the importance of companionship. There is no legitimacy in simply mandating the marriage of a man and a woman; the value of relationship has to be extended to all relationships. To

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population has been ignored by church and need attention. Raymond Kay Brown, Reach Out to Singles: A Challenge to Ministry (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979.; Britton Wood, Single Adults Want to be the Church, Too (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1977).

<sup>81</sup> Carolyn A. Koons and Michael J. Anthony, Single Adult Passages: Uncharted Territories (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 72.

understand Noah's story as God's concern only for the pairs is an exaggeration. Simply, male and female of each kind were needed for the continuation of the species. To stretch this to say that God only cares for pairs is absurd.<sup>82</sup>

The theology of living single has to be reaffirmed. Christianity is grounded on a theology that can empower not only those who are married, but also those who are single. It is important to understand the creation story in the light of forming relationships. Koons and Anthony underscore that the creation story helps us to understand interpersonal relationships and emotional intimacy with others.<sup>83</sup> It is not only between a man and a woman that an authentic relationship occurs. And it is not only between a man and a woman that human beings feel emotionally intimate. Authentic relationships and intimacy can be felt in companionships other than that of marriage. What the creation story emphasizes is the fundamental aspect of humans being in relationship. Koons and Anthony emphasize that "to desire companionship is a validation of one's humanity," meaning that human beings were created to be in relationship.<sup>84</sup> From the beginning of creation, humans formed relationships. Anderson and Gardner stress that human beings are not meant to be alone, and emphasize that the dominant Christian message is that human beings are meant for community.<sup>85</sup> They see that being in community is the central characteristic of being human. Being in relationship with God means to be in a community of relationships, and this relationship with God cannot be understood apart from our being with others.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Koons and Anthony, 72.

<sup>83</sup> Koons and Anthony, 72.

<sup>84</sup> Koons and Anthony, 79.

<sup>85</sup> Anderson and Gardner, 20.

<sup>86</sup> Anderson and Gardner, 21.



### Aloneness: Loneliness and Solitude

This section will review aloneness of single women. Aloneness has two aspects: being lonely or being in solitude. One can assert that just because a woman is living single she is not necessarily lonely, and that is absolutely a legitimate statement since not all single women feel lonely. However, according to Leonard Cargan, loneliness is the most common idea associated with being single.<sup>87</sup> People tend to think single women are surely lonely; thus, it is worthwhile to discuss this aspect of single women and aloneness.

“Alone” and “lonely” have distinct meanings. Studies show that being alone does not necessarily mean someone is lonely.<sup>88</sup> They point out that the term “aloneness” carries no negative connotations or feelings. Aloneness is part of human experience. Aloneness may likely be experienced as a choice, but when a person does not choose to be alone, loneliness may be precipitated. Herbert Anderson and Freda A. Gardner define loneliness as “what happens within a person when the ordinary and necessary needs for attachment and affection are not met.”<sup>89</sup> All humans have the need to be alone and together. But when the need for togetherness through attachment and affection are not met, loneliness occurs. As mentioned above, loneliness may be a feeling that is inevitable for all humans, or it may be a result of various life situations, such as losing a spouse by divorce.

Loneliness contains multiple feelings. William V. Arnold and Margaret Fohl define loneliness as “the painful experience of estrangement from self, others, or God, not

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<sup>87</sup> Cargan, Being Single on Noah’s Ark, 154.

<sup>88</sup> William V. Arnold and Margaret Anne Fohl, When You Are Alone, Resources for Living (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 27.

<sup>89</sup> Anderson and Gardner, 82.

by choice.”<sup>90</sup> Although how she experiences loneliness is different for every woman, it can be categorized as the feelings of emptiness, fear, dull ache, hopelessness, rejection, shame, and abandonment.<sup>91</sup> Women living single may feel emptiness and this feeling of emptiness could lead to vulnerability, where many times women just choose to be by themselves where they at least feel less vulnerable. Fear and dull ache are also strongly felt at times. Fear arises regarding how to cope or survive in life as a single; it is a feeling of a void in one’s life. Dull ache is a feeling that mostly occurs after divorcing or losing a spouse. One has processed grief in some ways and is able to function socially, but this dull ache comes from time to time when having to move away from the usual familiar experiences of the past.

Cargan lists the various ways people deal with loneliness.<sup>92</sup> Lonely people may take action and call or visit a friend, and since loneliness longs for intimacy, taking such an action may resolve the feeling of loneliness. Lonely singles may also do something to lessen the loneliness, such as exercising, reading, or learning something new, which helps to overcome loneliness by providing them with a sense of accomplishment. Some women distract themselves when they become lonely; they go shopping, for example, or go for a drive. Lonely women living single also deal with loneliness by not dealing with it; that is, they get helpless and do nothing.

By definition, loneliness has been distinguished from aloneness, and the different ways loneliness is understood have been elaborated. As there are different ways the feeling of loneliness is expressed, the ways women deal with loneliness are also varied.

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<sup>90</sup> Arnold and Fohl, 17.

<sup>91</sup> Arnold and Fohl, 20-25.

<sup>92</sup> Cargan, Being Single on Noah’s Ark, 163.

So far, loneliness was explained as an aspect of aloneness, but in the next part another aspect of aloneness--solitude--will be discussed.

Our society and culture tend to define aloneness only as being lonely, but loneliness is simply one result of being alone. As mentioned above, just because a woman lives single, it does not automatically translate into meaning she is lonely. It is true that single women can feel lonely, but they are further stereotyped by the society and their loneliness is exaggerated. However, another way to be alone is to be in solitude. There are many single women who have transformed loneliness into solitude. What is the meaning of solitude? Martin Israel sees it as something that is gained after a long journey of loneliness.<sup>93</sup> Loneliness is a long and dark process, but when one stands at the end of the loneliness, knowledge of the depth of one's being is gained. When women experience solitude, they get to know more about themselves and are comfortable with who they are. This recognition takes place at the deep center within a woman's self, where she is able to experience peace in the midst of all the noisiness and busy-ness of her life. The solitude experience is possible only when one has gained more knowledge of one's self and is grounded at the center of one's being.

Solitude is an alternative choice to loneliness. Arnold and Fohl define solitude as "the experience of meaning or enjoyment when alone with the self by choice."<sup>94</sup> The experience of solitude comes in different ways. Intentionally chosen moments of solitude can either be in ordinary time that is continued throughout life, or it could be at a moment of serious contemplation aiming for renewal. Solitude is possible either by physically

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<sup>93</sup> Martin Israel, Living Alone: The Inward Journey to Fellowship (London: SPCK, 1982), 17.

<sup>94</sup> Arnold and Fohl, 17.

being alone, or finding solitude in the midst of a crowd. Single adults need solitude, so that some priorities can first be tested in the quietness of the spirit.<sup>95</sup> Important decisions in life can be rehearsed in solitude. Loneliness has the sense that being by oneself is imposed by external reasons, but in solitude that choice is made intentionally by the self and is being enjoyed. It is “positive aloneness.”<sup>96</sup>

Solitude is a journey to inner peace. Anderson and Gardner describe the movement from loneliness to solitude as “a journey of the heart from sadness and despair to inner peace at the center of one’s being.”<sup>97</sup> And they distinguish solitude from loneliness.<sup>98</sup> With solitude of the heart, one can attend to the words and worlds of others, but in loneliness one selects remarks and events that bring satisfaction to one’s unmet needs. With solitude of the heart, one will not experience boredom, but in loneliness many choices will be based on the fear of boredom. By experiencing solitude, even the occasional lonely feelings do not diminish the sense of self, and complex life issues can coexist without having to have them all resolved. Thus, difficult issues that loneliness could not resolve may stay within the self in solitude, without interfering with one’s inner peace.

Solitude, in the words of the contemplative Thomas Merton, is “transcending.” Anderson and Gardner refer to Thomas Merton’s “transcending solitude” as one that focuses on being with God.<sup>99</sup> Merton explains, “Solitude has to be objective and concrete. It has to be a communion in something greater than the world, as great as

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<sup>95</sup> Harold Ivan Smith, Single: And Feeling Good (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 61.

<sup>96</sup> Arnold and Fohl, 37.

<sup>97</sup> Anderson and Gardner, 89.

<sup>98</sup> Anderson and Gardner, 91.

<sup>99</sup> Anderson and Gardner, 90.

Being itself, in order that in its deep peace we may find God.”<sup>100</sup> Living single is an experience of “transcending solitude” as Merton points out, where one entrusts oneself to silence that goes beyond all relationships.<sup>101</sup> This solitude is not something we gain or achieve; rather, it is accepting a gracious invitation to be still, renouncing one’s desires. Anderson and Gardner point out that Merton’s emphasis on solitude is never a renunciation of community or relationships, instead, it is finding God in the community and in relationships. Therefore, living single can produce the experience of “transcending solitude” where one renounces one’s desires and completely depends on the mercy of God.

In sum, solitude has been discussed as an alternative to loneliness. Solitude could be gained through the long process of loneliness where a woman obtains more knowledge of who she is. Compared to loneliness, solitude brings an experience of inner peace. Being human, we inevitably experience loneliness, but at the same time, we do not feel lonely in solitude, within our relationship with God.

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<sup>100</sup> Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1958), 58; quoted in Anderson and Garner, 90.

<sup>101</sup> Anderson and Gardner, 90.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter on the methodology of this study includes discussion of the various research methods that are utilized: the empirical method of qualitative research, specifically grounded theory; the hermeneutical methods of feminist and womanist pastoral theology and Relational Cultural Theory (RCT). Additionally, data collection and analysis procedures are described, paying attention to the issues of data saturation, reliability, and trustworthiness.

#### Method

##### Qualitative Method

The purpose of qualitative method is that, rather than objectively generalizing the situation, it allows one to search for a deeper meaning and a more thorough understanding of the experience and the context of the study's population, in this case, Korean American Christian divorcees. As Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss write: "Qualitative research allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables."<sup>102</sup> In qualitative research, subjectivity is valued and there is an attempt to understand and interpret the qualities of a certain context through semi-structured research methods. Qualitative research involves a variety of approaches.

As all divorce experiences are distinctive, the experience of Korean American divorced women has some aspects that are unique to its own context. Because of the

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<sup>102</sup> Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, Basics of Qualitative Research, 3d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 12.

particularity and distinctiveness of their experience, it cannot be understood simply through a dominant or generalized perspective. The qualitative method helps to reveal Korean American divorced women's experiences in several ways. Based on John McLeod's understanding of qualitative research, John Swinton and Harriet Mowat explain that the qualitative method consists of a particular way of *seeing* and *discovering*.<sup>103</sup> They explain that qualitative method is a research done in a natural setting that interprets and makes sense out of the studied phenomena by regarding the meanings people bring to them.<sup>104</sup> The strength of the qualitative method is that it takes human experience seriously and offers a thorough and rigorous explanation. It also offers a broader perspective in *seeing* and *discovering*, which allows the audience to realize the complexity behind the revealed reality. Thus, in an effort to learn more about Korean American divorced women's experience regarding their faith and the church, the qualitative research methods I use will enable the experience to be seen and to be discovered thoroughly and rigorously.

Ethnography is a form of qualitative research that studies living human beings in their social and cultural context.<sup>105</sup> Although the study of this dissertation was undertaken using grounded theory rather than ethnography, since they both share a critical element in doing research, ethnography can offer a valuable perspective regarding the study of Korean American divorced women. Mary Clark Moschella argues that ethnography is a form of "pastoral listening" that can help the congregation and the

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<sup>103</sup> John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, Practical Theology and Qualitative Research (London: SCM Press, 2006), 31-32.

<sup>104</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 29.

<sup>105</sup> Mary Clark Moschella, Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 25.

community to find its collective voice.<sup>106</sup> This is what this study of Korean American divorced women is aiming for--to search for the individual and the collective voice of Korean American divorced women in the churches. Moschella explains that incorporating ethnography makes it possible to discern the particular theology that is embedded in a certain population.<sup>107</sup> It allows a sense of where God is and how God is understood amongst them. Thus, studying Korean American divorced women's experience in the church through qualitative research will allow us to discover the individual and the collective voice of this experience. It also offers an understanding of God and of the theology that is uniquely developed and embedded amongst Korean American divorced women.

Within the qualitative method, grounded theory will be utilized to develop a theory regarding Korean American women's divorce. Grounded theory can be contrasted to theory generated by logical deduction from a hypothesis. Grounded theory research is concerned with development of a theory from a particular social setting. Theoretical concepts are verified as data collection unfolds, and analysis is given directly from the data instead of from a hypothesis. Strauss and Corbin write:

A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Moschella, 13.

<sup>107</sup> Moschella, 40.

<sup>108</sup> Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, Basics of Qualitative Research, 2d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 23.



What needs to be emphasized regarding the grounded theory method is that the theory is derived directly out of the data inductively. The data collection, analysis, and development of the theory happen simultaneously. Thus, in order to study a certain phenomenon, the researcher collects the data pertaining to the subject by carefully outlining the research. Regarding data analysis, grounded theory moves through four stages: codes, concepts, categories, and theory.<sup>109</sup> For this study of the transcribed data, key points are marked with codes and grouped into similar concepts to be formed into categories. From these categories, which are generated from the in-depth interview data, the theory will be created.

#### Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology

Feminist and womanist pastoral theology is utilized as one of the hermeneutical methods for this study. A feminist perspective concerns having the awareness and the ability to bring the effects of patriarchal culture on the research area into focus. In the case of my research, it fosters awareness about the role and effects of patriarchal culture in Korean American Christian divorced women's lives. Carrie Doehring emphasizes the importance of focusing on the patriarchal context and argues that a feminist perspective provides a lens through which to view patriarchal culture and tradition.<sup>110</sup> The whole dynamic within the larger cultural system, from where the issue of patriarchalism derives, is taken into consideration.

In the first chapter, pastoral theology was defined as an overarching concept of pastoral care and counseling. Pastoral theology refers specifically to the theological

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<sup>109</sup> Glaser and Strauss, Discovery of Grounded Theory Strategies for Qualitative Research.

<sup>110</sup> Carrie Doehring, "Developing Models of Feminist Pastoral Counseling," Journal of Pastoral Care 46, no. 1 (1992): 24.

discipline that focuses on theories, practices, and methods of pastoral care and counseling. Beginning with concrete human experience, its priority is to give a caring and useful response to the situation.<sup>111</sup> Thus, feminist perspective in pastoral theology begins with women's experiences, paying attention to the voices and perspectives of women. Feminist perspective, according to Christie Cozad Neuger, is built out of experiences of those who are disadvantaged by cultural and power dynamics.<sup>112</sup> Thus, the significance of the feminist perspective in pastoral theology is that it takes seriously the life experience of the underprivileged and the disadvantaged.

Feminist pastoral theology examines the dominance of patriarchal culture in order to better capture women's experience. It is concerned not only with personal transformation but also the transformation of the patriarchalism of whole cultures. Bonnie Miller-McLemore points out that the issue of feminist perspective is not simply about gender equality.<sup>113</sup> Treating it simply as gender equality reduces and confuses the intent. Neuger's definition addresses this point: feminism in pastoral theology is "a set of political assumptions and commitments that have to do with the transformation of a culture that disadvantages."<sup>114</sup> Neuger explains how pastoral theology cannot be feminist just because it pays attention to and listens to women's experiences and lives.<sup>115</sup> Pastoral theology cannot be feminist just because it has the awareness of the culture that has

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<sup>111</sup> Ramsay, "Contemporary Pastoral Theology: A Wider Vision for the Practice of Love," in Pastoral Care and Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms, 157.

<sup>112</sup> Christie Cozad Neuger, "Pastoral Counseling as an Art of Personal Political Activism," in The Arts of Ministry: Feminist-Womanist Approaches, ed. Christie Cozad Neuger (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 92-93.

<sup>113</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Feminist Theory in Pastoral Theology," in Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Austern (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 79

<sup>114</sup> Neuger, 92.

<sup>115</sup> Neuger, 93.

brought about the oppression. Having a feminist perspective in pastoral theology must go much further. Neuger asserts that the whole patriarchal culture has to be transformed, that pastoral theology can only be considered feminist when the goal is set to transform the culture, not only the individual.<sup>116</sup>

Further, womanism emerged in some respects in reaction to the racism inherent in white feminists' work, evidenced by the virtual absence of attention to race and ethnicity in early feminists' work. Both feminist and womanist pastoral theologies aim at challenging the social structure that imposes gender oppression. Both feminist and womanist perspectives put emphasis on transforming the society and the culture of patriarchy. Feminist and womanist pastoral theology both concern more than simply achieving equal rights and individual freedom. However, the definition of patriarchy is distinctive for the womanist. There is a need for womanists to define their own terms as they express their ideas,<sup>117</sup> including the issue of how to define "patriarchy." Within the womanist perspective, patriarchy is not simply a term that describes women's relationship to the male-dominated systems. Regarding the womanist definition of patriarchy, womanist theologian Delores S. Williams notes that the existing notion of patriarchy is often silent regarding the issue of class-privileged women oppressing underprivileged women; it is also silent on white men's and women's tendency to work together to keep intact white supremacy and privilege.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Neuger, 93.

<sup>117</sup> Delores S. Williams suggests, even after the term has been defined and expressed by the womanist view, it is not a fixed term; it needs to be revised repeatedly in order to discern whether the notion oppresses poor uneducated women or not. Delores S. Williams, Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 185.

<sup>118</sup> Williams, 185.

Another characteristic of the womanist perspective is that it stands on African American women's experiences, voices, and perspectives. Both racial and gender awareness become crucial in shaping womanist views. Although both feminist and womanist views now attend to racism, sexism, and classism,<sup>119</sup> for womanists, these factors are experiences that are lived in every part of their lives. Teresa E. Snorton underscores the importance of sociopolitical realities of sexism, racism, and classism in African American women's lives.<sup>120</sup> She indicates that experiences of these sociopolitical realities have a distinctive effect on African American women. For African American women, although they may adhere to the belief that "God places no more than one can bear," what these women face in reality *is* often more than one can bear. It is critical to pay attention to how African American women make sense out of their experiences of racism, sexism, and classism. Therapist Julia A. Boyd addresses the African American women's experience in shaping self-image.<sup>121</sup> She adamantly says, "Feminism that denies freedom of ethnic and cultural differences is not feminism; therapy that covertly denies the validity of a woman's ethnic and cultural experiences is not a therapy."<sup>122</sup> As indicated, the womanist perspective takes seriously a woman's ethnic and cultural experiences, including the negative and stereotypical responses African American women experience from racist, sexist, and classist cultures. These experiences provide a critical basis for the womanist perspective.

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<sup>119</sup> Neuger, 3.

<sup>120</sup> Teresa E. Snorton, "The Legacy of the African-American Matriarch: New Perspectives for Pastoral Care," in Through the Eyes of Women, ed. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

<sup>121</sup> Julia A. Boyd, "Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Feminist Therapy: Keys to Power," in The Black Women's Health Book: Speaking for Ourselves, ed. Evelyn C. White (Seattle: Seal Press, 1990), 226.

<sup>122</sup> Boyd, 231.

Now, as Miller-McLemore emphasizes, both feminist and womanist pastoral theologies demand a critical analysis of the social structure and its ideologies that label people as inferior and superior based on gender, sexual orientation, class, color, etc.<sup>123</sup> Referring to how bell hooks defined feminism, Miller-McLemore emphasizes that both the feminist and the womanist movements do not aim to benefit one specific group, class or race, but are concerned with having the power to transform all lives. Thus, this project of studying Korean American divorced women aims not only at empowering individual divorcees, but also at reforming the cultural structure and ideologies that label divorcees as inferior.

Feminist and womanist pastoral theological perspectives are discussed here as methods for analyzing the experiences of Korean American divorced women. However, as a Korean woman, I find that neither of these views is sufficient to understand the Korean American divorced women's experiences. As feminist and womanist views share certain perspectives together, such as gender and class issues, I will utilize these points of view for analyzing Korean American divorced women's experience. However, though feminist and womanist perspectives have awareness of some of the cultural contexts in which women are situated, they are insufficient to explain the experience of the first generation immigrant Korean American divorced women who are the focus of this study. Their experience as immigrant women is distinctive in comparison to most white and African American women, and difficult to understand adequately through the eyes of feminism or womanism. Thus, this study will be aware of Korean American women's

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<sup>123</sup> Miller-McLemore, 79.

immigrant culture and will put effort into developing a pastoral theological perspective sufficient for Korean American divorced immigrant women.

### Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT)

An additional hermeneutical method that will be used for data analysis is RCT. RCT is a feminist psychological theory and therapeutic model that is geared towards understanding women's development from women's psychological and cultural perspectives. RCT's core idea is that all growth occurs in connection, that all people yearn for connection, and that women in particular develop through growth-fostering relationships that are created through mutual empathy and mutual empowerment.<sup>124</sup> Empathy and empowerment are the crucial factors that bring an individual to growth. If one does not receive empathy and empowerment within the relationship, it is difficult for that person to experience growth. In order to explore and promote connection, for which all people yearn, there has to take place an examination of what brings disconnection in the first place. When one's experience is not validated and response to one's feelings does not take place, that individual keeps aspects of herself out of the relationship in order to keep the relationship. Then the individual will use what has been identified as strategies of disconnection to fit the relationship. This perspective of RCT is crucial in understanding divorced women's experience, since my interviews with them show that Korean American divorced women experienced disconnection. Divorcees yearn to have their experience validated, and mutual empathy and empowerment can be an important

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<sup>124</sup> Judith V. Jordan and Linda M. Hartling, "New Developments in Relational-Cultural Theory," in Rethinking Mental Health and Disorder: Feminist Perspectives, ed. Mary Ballou and Laura S. Brown (New York: Guilford Press, 2002), 48-70.

part of care that needs to be provided to the divorcees. This aspect will be further dealt with in the next chapter.

RCT provides critical concepts for understanding women's development and maturation. Because of patriarchy, women's development has traditionally been understood as similar to that of men's. Jean Baker Miller and Irene Pierce Stiver point to the fact that early psychoanalytic theories have contributed to the notion common in Europe and North America that becoming an independent and self-sufficient individual is the goal of human psychological development.<sup>125</sup> Early psychoanalytic theory also contributed to the common belief that psychological and social problems derive from the mother's inadequate childrearing, by which the mother has failed to raise her child with the independence and self-sufficiency that is understood to be the hallmarks of maturity.<sup>126</sup>

These norms are in operation today not only in western societies but also, to a smaller extent, in Korea, but they clearly manifest limits. There is a tendency to think of independent individuals as persons of psychological strength, and those with dependency as weak. Women are perceived to be dependent in many cases, and therefore are also perceived to be weak. Because social norms hold that being self-sufficient and independent is a sign of strength, many women work hard to achieve the goal of being self-sufficient. However, even when women achieve self-sufficiency, they are not praised for their achievements; rather, they are ridiculed again for being too strong, too tough, and not feminine enough. Consequently, even if the psychological norm aims at

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<sup>125</sup> Jean Baker Miller and Irene Pierce Stiver, The Healing Connection: How Women Form Relationships in Therapy and in Life (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>126</sup> Miller and Stiver, 2.

independence and separation, and there is the social and cultural tendency to accept and follow this as the norm, when women acquire such, patriarchal societies have difficulty in accepting the achievement.

Judith V. Jordan and Maureen Walker point out that the core of RCT is the intentionality of social implications for a human being.<sup>127</sup> It takes into consideration how social factors affect human beings. Miller and Stiver emphasize that RCT is concerned with how culture influences relationship in general.<sup>128</sup> The theory represents a growing awareness of the impact of culture, recognizing that no relationships exist separate and distinct from the larger culture.<sup>129</sup> Relational-cultural theory highlights the cultural aspect of what constitutes a human being. If the cultural aspect is ignored when seeking to understand humans, it is most likely that their experience and voice will be understood simply through the dominance of the Western perspective, trying to fit the individual's experience into the frame of those who are powerful. It is possible that their experience and voice will be misinterpreted or ignored, thus leading the individual to feel disconnected from relationships. Therefore, it is important to understand the role of culture in women's lives, and this is what RCT represents.

This dissertation is designed to better understand Korean American divorced women's experience. Qualitative method focuses on individual's experience and context rather than on generalization. Feminist and womanist pastoral theology provides a framework for listening to and analyzing the data provided by qualitative research

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<sup>127</sup> Judith V. Jordan and Maureen Walker, "Introduction," in The Complexity of Connection: Writings from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute (New York: Guilford Press, 2004), 4.

<sup>128</sup> Miller and Stiver, 21.

<sup>129</sup> Jordan and Walker, 3.



regarding women's experience. It helps to bring to focus which aspects of larger cultural systems are likely to dominate and disadvantage women. It takes seriously that the sociopolitical realities of sexism, racism, and classism must be changed if transformation is to occur, instead of focusing just on the individual. RCT will also be a valuable method in understanding Korean American divorced women's experience. RCT is concerned with how culture influences relationship in general. Korean American divorced women's experience needs to be understood not only from the individual's experience or from the perspective of a patriarchal system that dominates these women, but also from the context of these women being immigrants. This cultural aspect is an important part of their experience that cannot be overlooked, since that is their everyday context. RCT will offer a valuable perspective for examining and understanding Korean American divorced women's experience as an immigrant.

### Study Design

#### Data Collection

The researcher has to be patient during the process of data collection, in order to pay full attention to the data being collected and the analysis of it. As research unfolds, the researcher has to move constantly between the data collection, coding, and analysis. Strauss and Corbin mention how important it is to not rush through the data collection.<sup>130</sup> The researcher needs to take time during the collection to analyze the data carefully. If this process is rushed, there is a high risk of missing important emerging concepts. It was in this spirit that undertook data collection, which was achieved through in-depth interviews.

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<sup>130</sup> Strauss and Corbin, 207.

### *Participants*

Participant selection was done in order to achieve a purpose sampling. The participant criteria were that they had to be a Korean American first generation immigrant divorced woman, who currently attends a Protestant Korean American church in the Southern California area. The participant needed to be divorced, all the legal papers having been filed and the divorce finalized. The years of divorce, years of marriage, years of Christian life, and their age were not included in the criteria. Participants were selected by the researcher, having obtained the permission of the senior pastors or other pastoral staff. The researcher requested that the divorcee(s) in the church be contacted individually, primarily by the pastor or the church's pastoral counselor. Upon the divorcee's permission and acceptance of the interview, the researcher received the contact information from the pastor or the pastoral counselor. Then, the divorcee was contacted and the person-to-person interview was set up.

### *Protection of Participants*

Before the interview, each participant was given an explanation of the research and its purpose, and they also received an informed consent form (see Appendix A). The consent form was handed out prior to the interview, and written and verbal consent was explained for the protection of the participants. The participants were to choose whether to participate in the interview after hearing and reading a description of the project. Participants were informed that they could choose which questions they felt safe in answering. It was emphasized that their participation was voluntary and that they were invited to share as much or as little as they felt comfortable sharing. However, if they potentially revealed some information that might trigger emotional sensitivity, they were

given a choice to leave the room and decide whether to come back or not. The researcher offered to follow up with these members, with up to two 1-hour counseling sessions at no cost. Upon my receiving their consent, two copies of the consent form were signed by the participant, one for the researcher and the other for the participant to keep.

### *Confidentiality*

Participants were also assured of the confidentiality of the information. Their real names would be revealed under no circumstances and only a random letter of the alphabet would be used during transcription of the recording. When the data were used in the dissertation or the presentation, no identifiable information would be included. All information was kept safe from others' access, and the digital recording was erased right after its transcription. Other materials, such as transcribed data, are to be destroyed after the dissertation is completed.

### *Sample Demographics*

Fifteen participants were selected and interviewed. The demographics of the sample were assessed into four different categories. In terms of respondent age, seven groups were identified, as illustrated in Figure 2. Most of the respondents in the sample were between 51 and 55 years of age. As it is shown in the Figure 2, all respondents were between the ages of 30 and 65.

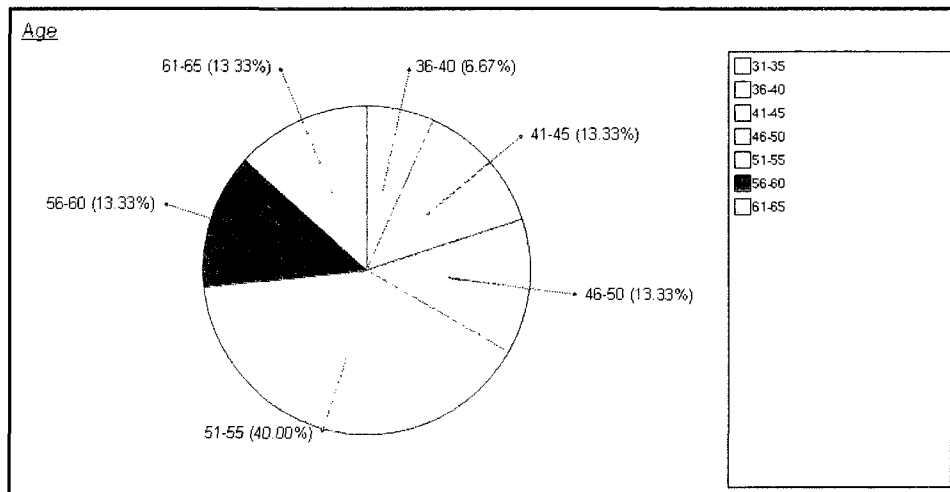


Figure 2. Respondent Age Groups

In terms of respondent years of divorce, six groups were identified, as illustrated in Figure 3. Most of the respondents had been divorced six to ten years.

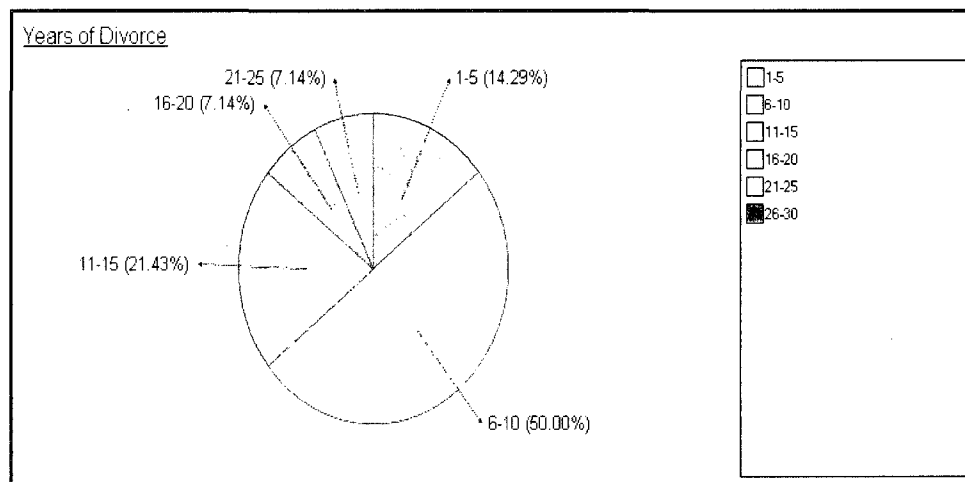


Figure 3. Respondent Years of Being Divorced

Regarding respondent years of marriage before divorce, six groups were identified, as shown in Figure 4. Most of the respondents were married between 6 and 10 years before their divorce.

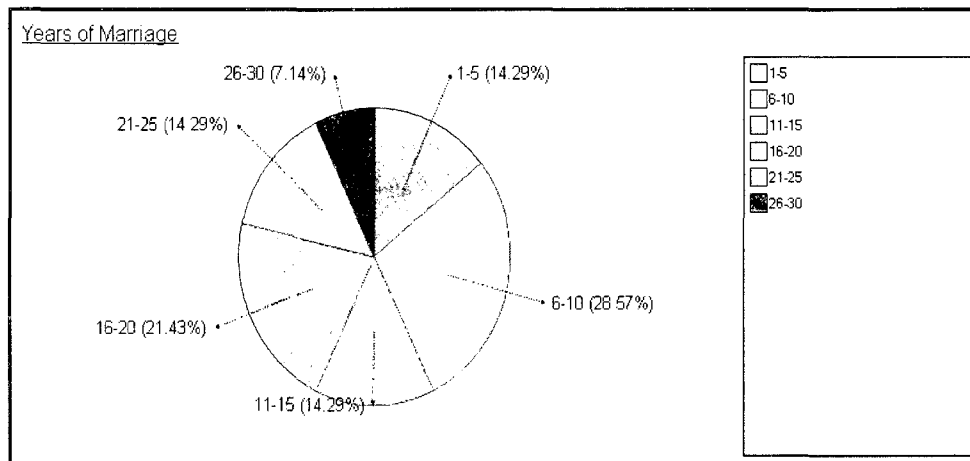


Figure 4. Years of Marriage

In terms of respondent years of attending church, six groups were identified, as illustrated in Figure 5. Most of the respondents had been attending 21 to 30 years.

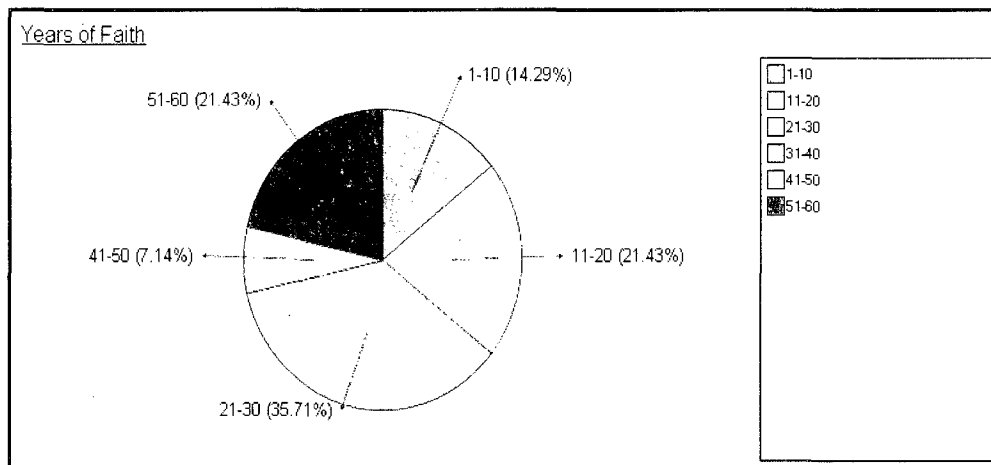


Figure 5. Years of Faith

### *In-depth Interview*

Activities of the interview included conducting one 90-minute individual in-depth interview session with each of the divorced women and collecting the data from the interview by listening to an extended and thorough description of their experience. The length of the interview was increased depending on the situation and whether there were sufficient findings. The participants were Korean American Christian women who are

divorced and currently living singly, either with or without children. The questions that were verbally presented were open-ended questions. The interview started with non-threatening questions that allowed the researcher to build a relationship with each of the participants. Questions for the participants are listed in Table 2. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Category I: Divorced Women in the Korean American Church

1. What was your experience in terms of the church's support during and after your divorce?

Category II: Biblical Understanding of Divorce

1. How do you perceive the understanding of the church regarding divorce in general?
2. Are there particular elements in the sermons or teachings of the church that have to do with divorce?

Category III: Theological Understanding of Divorce

1. What meaning does forgiveness have regarding your experience of divorce?
2. If ever, how has forgiveness affected your life?

Category IV: Spiritual Understanding of Divorce: Aloneness

1. What are some of your experiences, as a divorced woman, being stereotyped to be lonely?
2. What distinctive meaning does loneliness and solitude have for you?
3. If ever, how has loneliness or solitude affected your life?

Category V: etc.

1. Please share anything else that you feel is essential to your experience of divorce and your life in the church.

Table 2. Interview Script

Data Analysis

The goal of data analysis in grounded theory is to derive a theory. Theory is understood to mean a set of well-developed categories that are interrelated from the

perspective of a theoretical framework that explains the phenomenon of the research.<sup>131</sup>

In order to derive a theory, there are several processes that the data need to go through beforehand. In grounded theory, transcribing and coding begins after each interview. First, were interviews conducted and digitally recorded; they were transcribed by the researcher herself as soon as possible after the interview, using Microsoft Word. As each interview was transcribed and became available for analysis, the texts were imported into NVivo 8, a software program specifically designed for grounded theory and theory generation. The researcher then worked with the texts from NVivo 8, reading them repeatedly to look for an emerging concept. As the concepts emerged, codes were assigned.<sup>132</sup>

### *Coding*

Two types of coding processes were used, open coding and axial coding, from which core categories were delineated. Although open coding and axial coding could be understood as separate processes, Corbin and Strauss explain that open coding and axial coding go hand in hand.<sup>133</sup> Open coding is defined as “breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data.”<sup>134</sup> During the open coding process of the transcribed data, concepts and categories are identified and the researcher determines whether the concepts qualify in terms of their properties and dimensions. Properties are the characteristics that describe concepts, and dimensions are the variations

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<sup>131</sup> Corbin and Strauss, 55.

<sup>132</sup> NVivo 8 software uses the term “node” instead of codes, and “tree node” in place of category.

<sup>133</sup> Corbin and Strauss, 198.

<sup>134</sup> Corbin and Strauss, 195.

of the properties that provide range to concepts.<sup>135</sup> Axial coding is the process of relating concepts and categories to each other. It involves assembling the identified categories of open coding, and allowing the explanation of the phenomenon to emerge. It makes connections between categories and subcategories.

The transcribed data imported to NVivo 8 were coded according to the following process: as data was broken into codes, themes and concepts emerged; these themes were collected and organized in NVivo 8 as tree nodes; since all concepts do not directly relate to the theory that emerges, categories need to be formed out of concepts of codes; as themes and concepts were organized, the researcher reflected upon the themes repeatedly, relating back to the original transcribed data to check authenticity before grouping them into properties and sub-properties; once sub-properties and properties were grouped, the data were reflected upon again, and the categories which began to emerge were able to be finalized. It is possible to identify the categories, properties, and sub-properties which were generated using NVivo 8 (see Appendix B).

### *Saturation*

Grounded theory research is a method that generates a theory from data. It is understood that the data collection has reached a saturation point when “theory appears to be robust, with no gaps or unexplained phenomena.”<sup>136</sup> Corbin and Strauss explain that saturation also “denotes the development of categories in terms of their properties and dimensions, including variation, and if theory building, the delineating of relationship

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<sup>135</sup> Corbin and Strauss, 159.

<sup>136</sup> Kristie Saumure and Lisa M. Givens, “Data Saturation,” in The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods, ed. Lisa M. Givens, vol. 2 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 195.



between concepts.”<sup>137</sup> Simply speaking, saturation indicates the data collection point where no new concepts and categories emerge. Saturation is relative, of course, since some variation of the data may be revealed with any new data. Thus, it may be considered that the saturation point is reached when, despite the new data added, they add little to the emerging theory.<sup>138</sup> Relative saturation of this study was reached after the fifteenth interview, at which point only one new code emerged. In view of the fact that there were 182 total codes and that 25 codes emerged at the first interview, it was judged that the saturation point was achieved after the fifteenth interview.

### *Validity*

Validity refers to the researcher’s ability to gain a true, accurate impression of the phenomena studied. The importance of qualitative research is to “gain *understanding* of the experience of research participants, rather than to *explain* the experience.”<sup>139</sup> Validity could be affected by the researcher’s bias, which may limit the ability to observe the phenomena as they are. Pre-understanding of the phenomena is necessary for interpretation, but there exists a danger of limiting or excluding the pure data. However, the importance of qualitative research is to “gain *understanding* of the experience of research participants, rather than to *explain* the experience.”<sup>140</sup> Thus, validation according to this understanding in qualitative study is important.

The validity of this study was tested in several ways. First, issues that arose in the research were shared and discussed in a monthly meeting with an instructor and a peer. There were discussions related to the researcher’s bias and experience. Second, in order

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<sup>137</sup> Corbin and Strauss, 143.

<sup>138</sup> Saumure and Givens, 195.

<sup>139</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 121.

<sup>140</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 121.

to gain more understanding of divorced women's experience, besides the personal interviews, the researcher made a visit to the court to observe a divorce hearing. Third, the researcher met with an attorney practicing family law. These field experiences provided information regarding divorced women's reality in order to lessen the researcher's assumptions.

### *Trustworthiness*

The trustworthiness of findings from qualitative research can be evaluated through assessing the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher. In grounded theory, the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher is critical, because this form of research requires the ability of the researcher to recognize relevance and give meaning in collecting the data. Theoretical sensitivity is derived from the researcher's being aware of the literature, from personal and professional experience, and from continuous interactions of the researcher with the data. In this study, my theoretical sensitivity was established by reviewing relevant literature, having had the experience of offering individual counseling and a therapeutic group to Korean American divorced women, and through my ongoing interaction with the research study and data.

In addition, in order to minimize participant and researcher biases, "pastoral listening" was adapted. When explaining ethnography, Moschella emphasizes "a way of immersing yourself in the life of a people in order to learn something about and from them."<sup>141</sup> In doing this, she emphasizes pastoral listening as a way of honoring and validating the other person's experience. Adapting Moschella's pastoral listening, I was aware of practicing pastoral listening even from the initial phone contact. I was fully

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<sup>141</sup> Moschella, 4.

aware that participants were sharing their valuable and difficult experiences in life; thus, I put effort into providing a pastoral presence in listening to the interviewees.

### *Language*

Two languages were used to collect and analyze the data: Korean and English. Personal in-depth interviews were conducted in Korean, the language that is more familiar to the first generation Korean women. Each interview was transcribed also in Korean. After I translated the interviews into English, the transcribed data was imported into NVivo 8 for analysis and coding in English. For the rest of the data analysis, only English was used.

### Summary

This chapter discussed the two methods used in the dissertation: qualitative field research and hermeneutical methods of interpretation and analysis. Grounded theory was used for data collection and analysis of experiences of Korean American divorced women in the Korean American churches. Data collection was by means of interviews with participants; the data was transcribed and coded from NVivo 8. While coding, themes and concepts emerged, and they were grouped into sub-properties, properties, and categories. Saturation and trustworthiness were also discussed. Hermeneutical methods adopted to enhance the analysis--feminist and womanist pastoral theology and RCT--were discussed.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter reports the findings from the collected data, obtained through interviews with fifteen Korean American divorcees from eleven different Korean American churches regarding their post-divorce adjustment issues. In-depth personal interviews with open-ended questions were used for data collection. The interviews conducted in the Korean language and digitally recorded; I transcribed the recordings in Korean. Grounded theory was then used for data analysis: interviews were coded in order to generate concepts and categories. From the process of analysis, multiple categories emerged regarding Korean American women's experience of divorce. When coding the data, I translated the main names of the codes into English. Eight main categories emerged from the data analysis: *Traditional Notions*, *Decision Making*, *Divorce and the Church*, *Biblical Understanding*, *Theological Understanding*, *Forgiveness*, *Aloneness*, *Post-Divorce Issues*, and *Positive Outcomes of Divorce*.

In this chapter, the findings of the research are presented by category and their respective properties and sub-properties. The report of the findings will follow the order of categories listed above. The order is determined by its relevance and relationship to each category, which will lead to theory building in the following chapter. To illustrate each category, representative quotes from the interviews are presented; quotes from the interviews are my own translation. To protect confidentiality, the speakers here remain anonymous, and no identifying details are revealed. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed. The interviews were conducted and transcribed in the Korean

language. When coding the data, the main names of the codes were translated into English. The code and quotes that are provided here are my own translation.

Eight main categories emerged from the data analysis: *Traditional Notions, Decision Making, Divorce and the Church, Biblical Understanding, Theological Understanding, Forgiveness, Aloneness, Post-Divorce Issues, and Positive Outcomes of Divorce*. The actual phrasing of the categories is in my own wording; however, they are based on the content of the interview. The report of the findings will follow the order of categories listed above. The order is determined by its relevance and relationship to each category, which will lead to theory building in the following chapter.

### Traditional Notions

The first category that emerged from the data was Traditional Notions (see Figure 6). Korean American divorced women either carried traditional notions within themselves or heard multiple times from others about what traditionally is believed and how one should traditionally behave. This category was saturated and resulted in two properties: *Marriage* and *Traditional Notions Embedded*. The property *Marriage* revealed three associated sub-properties: *Notion of Marriage*; *Blaming Wife for Divorce*, and; *In-law's Reaction to Divorce*. The property *Traditional Notions Embedded* revealed two sub-properties: *Traditional Role of Wife* and *Unlucky Fate*.

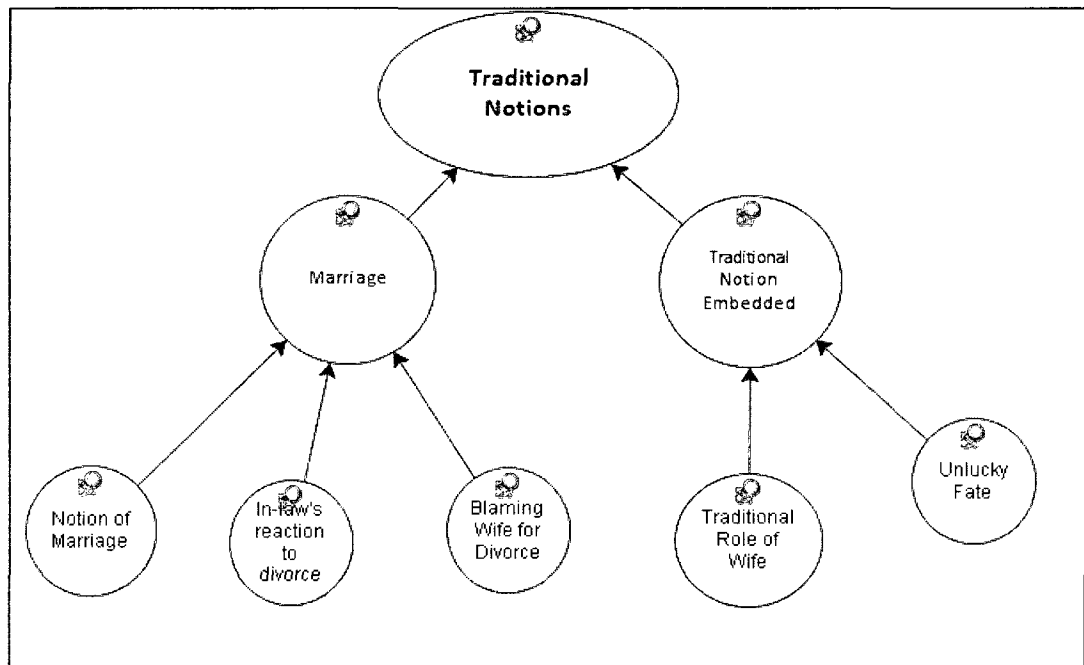


Figure 6. Category: Traditional Notions

### Marriage

The first property is the traditional notion of marriage. More than half of the interviewees carried a traditional belief of what a marriage should be.

Everyone must have different reasons for their divorce. I cannot only blame my husband for the divorce, because like the saying, it takes two hands to clap, which means there is a problem on both sides. Our generation believed that once you are married into your husband's family, you must endure to live with them until you become their ghost. But I found that reality is different.

This interviewee thought marriage was to be a bond that cannot be broken, at least not by the wife. She believed that the wife should endure through everything for the rest of her life.

I asked some people whether I should get a divorce. They told me to live through it.

Advice on whether to divorce was sought and people advised the wife to remain in the marriage. From the traditional Korean belief that is based on Confucianism, there was an

expectation that women should endure and stay in the marriage. When the divorce occurred, the wife was mostly blamed.

I think people tend to make divorcing decisions much too easily than 22 years before when I got divorced. I see lots of people divorced around me. Before, people used to say, "If it is not too big of a deal, just bear the situation. Do not get divorced." I heard this so many times. And in divorce they blame women for not keeping the family.

Lots of older people told me this. First they do not know whether I am divorced or not, but when they find out, the first thing they tell me is, "Why did you get divorced? You even have two kids and said they were young back then, so why didn't you just endure?"

Due to the traditional notion that is based on Confucian belief, Koreans tend to believe that it is the woman's job to keep the family together and to keep it joyful; women should not break the marriage and should show endurance in any circumstance. Thus, when divorce occurs, the wife is blamed for being too impatient to keep the family together.

Another traditional notion divorcees often face is the pressure to be married.

If I share that I am divorced and singled, then the response is often about how I need to get married. People offer to introduce men. I think Koreans believe one must be married.

Being divorced and single is not perceived to be a normal status; therefore, the traditional notion holds that one needs to be married. This becomes a pressure for the divorced women, since their divorced status does not seem to be accepted and they are perceived to be incomplete.

#### *Traditional Notions Embedded*

Regarding traditional beliefs, it was mostly reported that these beliefs were forced onto the divorced women, but there was also a similar belief held within the divorced women themselves, in that they believed in the traditional understanding of wife's role and their fate.

I think it would have been a less of a burden if I was the deserted one, but since I was the one who insisted on divorcing him while my ex-husband wanted to stay in the marriage, it is sometimes a burden. I wonder if I just should have endured a little more. But I think I did my best.

The traditional notion of a wife is that she endures. Thus, as in this case, the interviewee at times wonders whether she should have been more enduring. She feels burdened about not being a traditional wife, who is believed to endure through every circumstance.

There are several other traditional beliefs about the wife that are reported. These descriptions show how traditional beliefs were prevalent in the relationships of the interviewees.

When I was married, we would often have an argument, and you know, it is hard to talk only nicely when you get angry. But traditionally, you can't talk bad to your husband, so what I will do is get in the car and start cursing when I am all by myself.

Even in an argument, the wife believes she cannot talk bad to her husband and needs to pay some respect to him by choosing her words carefully.

The traditional role the wife plays is influential in other areas.

I came to the United States a long time ago, but when I was married I always cooked a hot meal for my husband even in the early morning. Not only that, but I packed him lunch every single day, and had the dinner table ready when he got home. Some people told me that I am spoiling my husband, but it was not a burden to me, I felt comfortable doing it.

When I was living with my husband, I could not rest when I wanted to rest. I have to sleep long hours to feel rested, but my husband only slept short hours. So I used to carry a blanket in my car and rest inside the car.

The wife is completely on her husband's schedule. She not only prepares three meals a day for him, but makes it available exactly at the time he gets home. The wife also feels uncomfortable resting when her husband is around, so she would take a break in the car



during the daytime. The wife believes this is the role she should play, so she does not think of it as a burden. These sacrifices are understood to be acceptable by the wife.

Women usually try to endure as much as they can for their children. I did my best to carry on. I can live without a husband, but not without my children. When a woman gets married the husband is the priority, but when she has her children, they become her priority. I would sacrifice myself for my kids, but not for my husband.

The traditional notion of sacrifice is quite prevalent. Others are prioritized as being more important than the wife. First is the husband, but when children come along, they become the priority, and the mother is expected to sacrifice and make it through any way she can.

Besides the traditional role of the wife, the husband is expected to take responsibility as a husband.

I think in families where the husband is the breadwinner, divorce might be more of a difficult decision, since the wife will be worried about managing finances after her divorce. But since I had a job, I think I was able to be more free in that area. Or maybe, that could have been the reason my husband was unbearable, since my husband did not earn anything. If my husband was the breadwinner, I may have been obedient and lived with whatever I had, but because I had the financial ability, I may have chosen to divorce more likely.

Thus, there is a certain expectation that the husband will play the traditional role of a husband, which is being economically responsible for the family.

Another traditional notion embedded in divorced women and prevalent in Korean culture regards their fate. The divorcee believes that it is her fate that she is divorced.

I was born in the year of the horse. It is believed that women born in the year of the horse are tough. I think that is partly right since I see lot of single women that are the same age as me. Single women mostly seem to be born on that year. Especially if you are born in 1954, Chinese people said it is the year of the white horse, which is particularly tough and strong. Maybe that is the reason a lot of women born that year is living single.

The reason for divorce is related to one's fate. It is fate that she was born in the year of the horse. In the traditional understanding, women who are born in that year are known to be particularly rigorous and tough, which is the opposite of what the traditional image of women was set to be. Therefore, she believes that it is perhaps because of her rigorousness and toughness that she is now divorced, and that it was meant to be since that is her fate.

As seen in this section of findings, traditional notions are emphasized and enforced regarding the status of the divorcees. People still perceive them with this notion that one ought to be married no matter what. Even if the marriage is difficult, the wife is expected to endure through it. If she is divorced, she ought to remarry. These perceptions come not only from other people, but are embedded in the divorcees themselves regarding the traditional expectations of sacrifice, the role of the wife, and of fate.

### Decision Making

Decision making is the second category that emerged from the findings (see Figure 7). Divorce is a process that requires a tremendous effort in making the decision. During the interview, interviewees shared how they came to make the decision to divorce. This category was saturated and resulted in four properties: *Hesitancy in Decision*; *Regrets in Decision*; *Divorce for Survival*, and; *Confidence in Decision*. The property *Hesitancy in Decision* revealed four associated sub-properties: *Divorce and Sacrifice*; *Thoroughly Thought Over*; *Hesitance Due to Children*, and: *Limits of Endurance*. The property *Regrets in Decision* revealed an associated sub-property: *Still Questioning the Decision*.

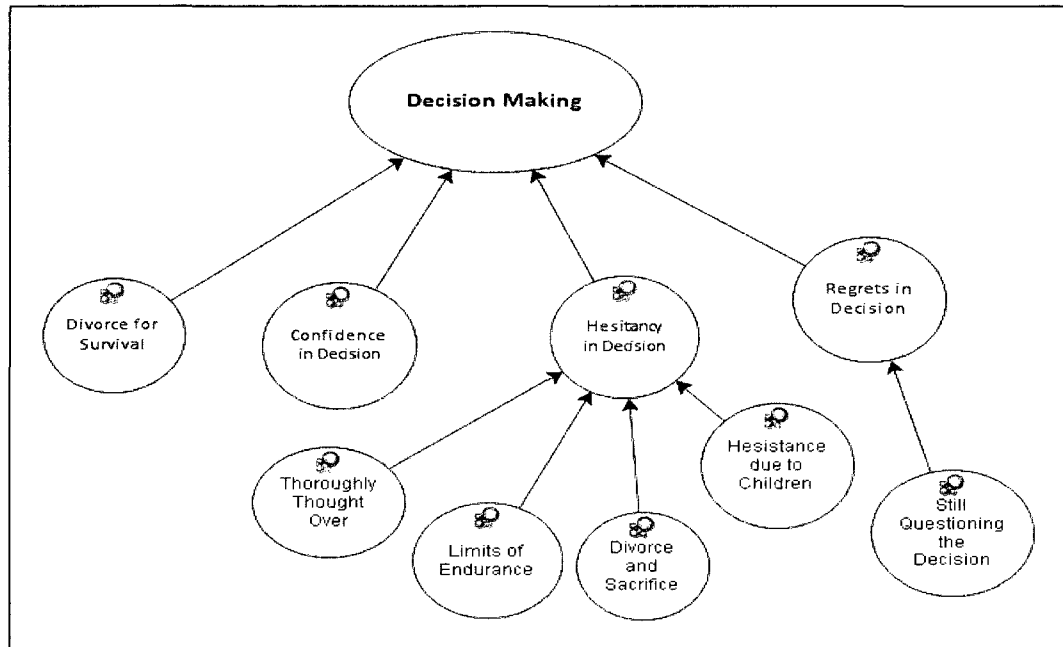


Figure 7. Category: Decision Making

### Hesitancy in Decision

There was resistance and hesitancy due to several reasons. One is regarding children.

I pretty much made up my mind to separate, but I could not finalize it because of my children. I did not think I could handle my children on my own in case they got involved with gangs or drugs. I believed they needed a father figure. I was so worried about my children, so I could not make up my mind. My husband would come home sometimes and beat me and destroy everything around, but still, because I believed my sons needed a father, I thought it was better just for him to show up sometimes. That is why I did not finalize my divorce. I kept on telling myself to endure and endure, endure for the kids.

Children are main factors in the decision to divorce. She is willing to endure even through violence if not divorcing is better for her children. There is a tendency to think even a violent husband is needed, because the children need a father.

My husband was in-and-out of prison with his problem with alcohol. I warned him if it happens one more time, I am never seeing him again. I hated seeing him drunk. But he was imprisoned once again, so I told the kids, "I do not want anyone to tell me later maybe I should have endured some more. If that is what you are going to think, I will rather stay with your father."

The reason that children are a major discerning factor is because the wife does not want her choice to result in causing any disadvantage or unwanted consequence for her children.

I hesitated getting divorced because of the children. I did not want my children to have any problems when they grew up and got married. Since my divorce, I was concerned the most regarding my children's future.

This interviewee is worried that her divorced status will cause harm to her children's future. The concern is regarding whether her children will have difficulty finding a spouse, since it is believed no one would want to marry a person from a broken family.

Another consequence of divorce that brings hesitancy to the decision making process is regarding the change in one's social status.

When I was getting divorced, rather than being relieved from the thought that I do not have to be beaten by my husband anymore, I was more concerned about how my social status will fall.

When I was still married, my children ran into their rooms whenever they heard their father's car in the driveway. My children believe it is much more peaceful since their father does not live with us. But my own barrier in getting divorced was that I did not have the courage to let go of my wealth and my position, which held me together until then.

It is difficult to make the decision since there is a fear that the decision one makes will bring about a consequence that may be unbearable. In these cases, the consequence was the degrading of social status as well as of financial stability. Divorcees were unsure whether they could carry on a life without these elements that seemed to provide a sense of security.

There are various reasons why wives contemplating divorce feel hesitant in their decision; however, the findings show that some divorced women are confident with their decision. They assert that the decision to divorce was thoroughly thought through.

Some people insist my ex and I reunite together since we both are still singles. Then I tell them how I do not like hearing it, since we both went our separate ways. Other people may think 'this is a trial period,' but for me it is different. If you decide to divorce after living together for twenty-six years, you have to know that I thought it over thoroughly.

It may be perceived that divorce was based on a momentary decision, but for these interviewees, they are adamant that it was thought through for a long time.

I knew that my marriage would not work out even from the beginning. It was my fault, and I was irresponsible. And one day I thought "I cannot do this, it is beyond my power," because there was no hope. I knew my husband was never going to change. If he is not going to change and if I cannot bear through any longer, then what is the alternative? The alternative is either I live pretending to be dead or break away from this situation.

No one in my church knew, but my married life was so difficult. I wanted to get some help so I saw different therapists. I tried Christian counseling and some other secular counseling. One of the therapists asked me the very first session, "Why are you still staying?" I did not like being asked such question, because I sought help not wanting a divorce. Going to counseling was my effort to try to stay in the marriage. I was looking for a way not to get a divorce.

I decided to get divorced at the very last minute. I was praying that I would not make any decisions myself. The reason I was praying to God was to think carefully through. I did not pray with the decision already made. I did not know what to do, and was even confused about what God wanted me to do. I just believed that God will lead me through.

It emerged from the findings that, in general, the decision to divorce was avoided. The effort was put into saving the marriage rather than breaking it. Psychological and spiritual help was sought in order to avoid the final decision of getting divorced.

Because our marriage was a difficult one, we were separated for a year and got back together again. We really tried. I was okay with my husband meeting someone else outside of marriage, but his battery was too harsh. When I was young, I thought I still needed to live despite his beatings, but as I aged, my body could not take it anymore. My kids wanted me to get divorced. They encouraged me and told me they do not want me to stay in the marriage just for the sake of them. I cannot even describe how long it took to finally gain the courage it took to divorce. I really did not think I could stand on my own.

Divorce is not only thoroughly thought through, but also chosen as the last resort. The effort to stay in the marriage mostly precedes the decision to divorce, even if it means putting one's life in danger.

### Divorcing for Survival

Overall, the decision to divorce was a carefully thought through process, in which the final decision mostly was made as the last resort. Some divorced women went through life and death situations before making the decision, choosing to divorce only as a way of survival. The decision was made after the marriage had affected them with dangerous physical and psychological consequences.

I lived in what seemed like the darkness for too long. I thought women had to stay in marriage no matter what. I totally lost myself, and did not have the courage whatsoever to be on my own. In marriage, he trained me like an animal. I would feel so different whenever I was with him. I also was severely depressed and mumbled as if I was mentally ill. I noticed I was gradually becoming crazy, and that is when I thought I cannot take it anymore.

Divorce is a difficult decision that requires tremendous courage, especially when one is psychologically dependent on the husband. In this case, the wife endured an animal-like treatment from the husband, but she remained fearful of divorce since she was unsure whether she could be independent. Thus, she even experiences depression and notices that her psychological health is in danger.

This interviewee also experiences physical problems that leave her with no other choice than to divorce. In her effort to keep the marriage, her health is challenged in a severe way.

My husband and I tried the couples' retreat held by one of the Catholic Churches. We also talked to other pastors and their wives. Maybe because they all belong to church, they told me to endure through it. I did everything they told me to. But later as I was praying I heard a voice from deep within, which was that I needed to live. I gained confidence and thought "yeah, I really need to survive." At the

time I had a heart problem due to the stress from the marriage. When laying down, I could not even breathe well. The voice within me alerted me enabling me to recognize that I needed to survive in order to raise my child. Before my family always was the priority, but I could no longer live in the same way.... To think of it, I may have been able to endure through my marriage. But if I have, I may have died.

Four interviewees reported that divorce was chosen as a way of survival. In this case, the wife experienced critical physical challenges in the effort to save her marriage. However, she realized that if she went on any longer, her life would be at risk. Thus, for her child and for herself, she put herself as the priority. She chose to live.

What I thought of when I was divorcing my husband was "I want to live." I so hated my husband and thought if I carried on, it would cost my life. I cannot be sure now, but if my marriage came to that point, I may even have given up on God.

This is not a case of immediate physical danger; nonetheless, there exists a need for survival. Divorce is chosen as the last resort in order to save her self.

I was so exhausted from my marriage. At last I prayed to God, "I do not think I can hold on any longer. Please bring this relationship to a close in any way." It seemed like my mentality was barely hanging on, and thought I cannot go on like this any longer, that I may even die. And that is when everything came to an end.

For these women, divorce was not based on a momentary decision. It was based on a long-term seeking of answers and enduring patiently through the struggles. This shows that all the woman's strength is put into saving the marriage, which becomes a challenge for her physical, psychological, and even spiritual well-being. Thus, one final outcome of this section is that the decision to divorce was thoroughly thought over. It was not made hastily nor was it an easy process.

### Regrets in Decision

After a long struggle, the final decision is made to divorce. Overall, divorced women are confident with the decision they have made. However, under certain circumstances and certain periods, the decision is regretted.

Yes, I regretted a lot. When I would see a couple devoted in serving the church, it just looked so great and thought it really was an ideal image to God, like Priscilla and Aquila in the Bible. There are more opportunities to serve in the church is you attend as a couple. There are some limits to my service since I am a single.

When there seems to be a limit to what you can do after divorce, divorce may be regretted. In this case, the interviewee's ability to serve in the church was limited due to her marital status. She felt she could have better served as a couple. Additionally, she not only wanted to serve in the church as a couple, but also felt that it would be more pleasing before God.

There also exist other regrets that occur from time to time.

I wonder if I should have been more enduring, but I think I did my best. If I stayed, I might have had difficulty controlling my emotions.

I sometimes think I was too selfish in divorcing my husband. But, I am aging and I want to look out for my comfort, too.

These interviewees feel guilty for their decisions at the time, and thus wonder whether the decision could have been reversed in any way. However, these regrets do not seem to have profound weight in their lives. They think about them, but generally come to a conclusion that their choice was right.

Regarding the decision, a critical view also exists.

I think divorced persons like to rationalize their position. They do not want to be pitied but want to keep up their pride, so they rationalize themselves by saying divorce was the right decision. They say it was the right thing to do, because if they were still married, their life would have been miserable, at least that is what they believe. They are not saying that because their present life is absolutely



satisfying. So, divorce seems to have been the right choice, not because they are totally satisfied with their current situation, but because they keep referring to the past.

This view is critical of how divorced women perceive their decision. There is a separation between not being regretful and confidence in the decision. Some divorced women do not feel regretful; they feel confident with their decision. But the above interviewee argues that such a position really is not confidence but rationalization; the interviewees are not totally satisfied currently, but imagining being in the same unchanged relationship, they tend to think the current state is better.

#### Confidence in Decision

Although there are some regrets regarding the decision to divorce, the findings show that divorced women are also confident with their decision.

Since I am a Christian, I feel guilty before God and also have sympathy for my ex-husband, but mostly I think I made the right decision.

If a pastor insists that I go back to my husband, I may give it a serious consideration. But I really like the way it is now.

In these statements, the women show that they are somewhat reluctant to state that divorce was absolutely the only solution, and their religiosity supports their reluctance. Nevertheless, these statements could be understood to mean that they are generally satisfied with their current decision and also feel confident about the decision they have made.

There also exists a position that manifests a firm confidence.

I have no shame in my decision so I try not to hide it anywhere. Of course it is not that I want every single person to know, but so what if they do? If they have something to say about it, I would say, "It is none of your business, what do you know about me? What do you know about our marriage?" I really cannot understand those who feel shameful and try to hide their divorce.

This shows that this interviewee is more confident and adamant about the decision she has made than most interviewees. She reveals no regrets; rather, she insists that divorce should not be as shameful as some perceive it to be. This case also manifests how divorce is a personal matter, and that each case has its own distinctiveness. Divorce cannot be understood through a single point of view; each case needs to be considered from its distinctive standpoint.

The decision feels so confident that some divorced women do not want to revisit past burdens.

I am so satisfied now. I am not sure why I dragged around such burden of marriage. I feel sorry for my kids, but I do not want to bear the burdens anymore.

I may not have been loved as a woman, but simply thinking about divorce from the personal perspective, I know I did the right thing. I can be confident in front of people. My husband was unable to be responsible for the family due to his alcohol problems, but I prioritized my children and did what I can, so I was okay.

These interviewees' confidence leads them to feel healed, spiritually grown, and stronger in inner strength. This leads them to support and respect others in their own decision to divorce.

The decision seems to have provided an opportunity for spiritual growth for me.

I carry this great big burden of being divorced. But to think of it, I am not sure whether I could have grown spiritually if it was not for divorce. Although I did get a divorce, I am healed by my faith. At first it seemed like I failed greatly, but now I think I really did the right thing. This is just not a humanly confidence, but I am not ashamed of my divorce even before God.

Maybe we would have worked out our problems at the end, but looking back, I think I made the right decision. Because of divorce I gained the courage to overcome any barriers in life. I did not have to waste any energy in marriage, but focused the effort in living. I think getting a divorce is much better than going through so much marriage problems. I do not have any regrets. I know I did the right thing.

Before when people asked about my marital status, I would not bother to explain. But now I do not hesitate to share that I am a divorced single woman. Whenever I see other divorcees, they may be in a deep agony now, but if the decision was made right, I want to tell them that they did the right thing.

Divorce is a difficult decision to make. But as these findings show, there are divorced women who feel confident about their decision. They believe they made the right choice. The decision helps them to be free of burdens that marriage forced them to carry. It also helps them to have a deeper and a more mature relationship with God. In addition, it enables them to live their life in a more effective way, allowing them to focus their energy where it is needed. Thus, some divorcees are so confident in their decision, they want others to have assurance that they too have made the right choice.

### Divorce and the Church

This dissertation is a study of Korean American Christian divorced women. Therefore, divorced women in the church were interviewed and the interview contained questions regarding their experience of the church as divorced women. The resulting findings reveal that each of them had a rich experience regarding their divorce and the church, and in general this experience was both positive and negative. The category of *Divorce and the Church* (see Figure 8) was saturated and resulted in five properties: *Divorcees' Attitude within the Church; Perception towards Divorcees; Ministry Focus; Pastoral Support and Insensitivity, and; Comments for the Future Church.*

The property of *Divorcees' Attitude within the Church* revealed five associated sub-properties: *Afraid of Criticism; Narrow Choice in Choosing Church; Hesitance in Opening Up; Low Expectations for the Church, and: The Least Considerate Place of Divorcees.* The property of *Perception towards Divorcees* revealed four sub-properties: *Unbiased Church; Biased Church; Stereotyping, and: Comparison with Other Singles.*

The property of *Ministry Focus* revealed five sub-properties: *Disadvantage of Singles*; *Focus on the Couples*; *Male-Focused Ministry and Service Opportunity*; *Outward Focus*, and; *Single Women's Group*. The property of *Pastoral Support and Insensitivity* revealed eight sub-properties: *Inability of Counseling*; *Support and Validation*; *Lack of Pastoral Support*; *Disregarding Divorcees' Opinion*; *Disadvantage of Service Due to Single Status*; *Ignorant in Caring for Divorcees*; *Pastor's Support*, and: *Confidentiality*.

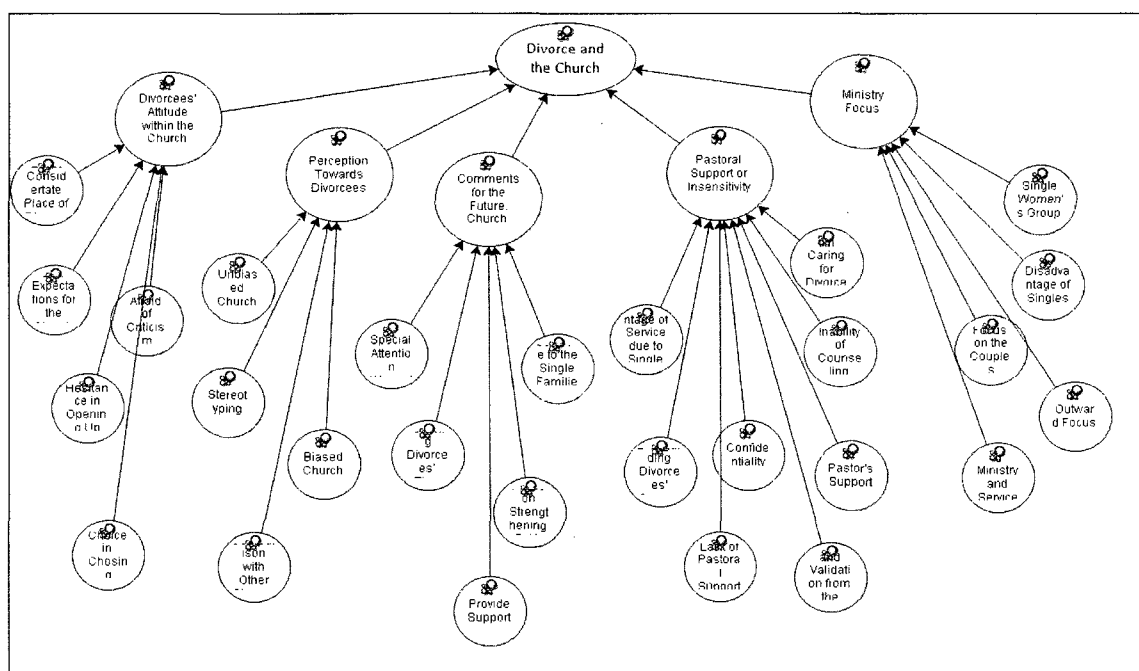


Figure 8. Category: Divorce and the Church

### Divorcees' Attitude within the Church

This section will show divorced women's attitude toward the church. Church is where a good deal of interaction between people and relationships takes place, particularly in Korean American society. Therefore, it is not surprising that many interviewees commented on their attitudes toward the church.

Some divorced women bring to their encounters in church their own high level of sensitivity about their marital status.

I think feeling uncomfortable is something that I just tend to feel. Whenever I go to a new place I become passive and fear how I will be perceived. So I sometimes just try to avoid the situation.

But even if a woman has grown less preoccupied with her marital status, as this interviewee portrays, in the church her marital status receives more attention than she wants. It is almost inevitable that a woman's divorced status is revealed.

I do not think about whether I am a single, divorced, or married. And I also do not think much about how others perceive me, but when I first got divorced, I was quite fearful of people's perception and condemnation. Others really have no idea how I ended up in divorce, but rather than trying to understand my situation, Koreans first tend to label me as divorced.

This shows well how labeling and criticism is prevalent, rather than understanding.

This also shows how divorced women may well anticipate negative perceptions from others. Due to the fear of being labeled and criticized, divorce is often kept as a secret.

My friend got divorced last year, but she and her ex-husband still go to church together. It is not because they have faith or have a good relationship, it's because the church does not know they are divorced. They chose not to reveal it, because they think if one person knows, the whole church knows. They will talk behind their backs and look at them differently.

Concern about negative perception of divorced persons led the couple to pretend to be married even after divorce.

I did not tell the church for a long time. They just thought my husband was away somewhere. Why did I keep it a secret? Because they will look at me differently. At least that is what I think.

Divorced women believe that that they will receive such special unwanted attention if people start labeling them as a divorcee. The findings of this study indicate that most interviewees do not want to be perceived differently from other members.

Due to the fear of criticism and labeling, interviewees sometimes had a hard time finding a church after the divorce.

I had such a hard time finding the right church. One church that I went to had so many people I already knew, and so I was ashamed of attending any longer. Well, I guess more than the shame, I did not think I could adjust there well since they might be talking about whose wife I am. Then I tried going to another church where I only know one person from before. After divorce I became quite timid and kept on being sensitive about what people thought of me.

Thus, this interviewee experiences a narrow selection of churches, since she is aware of people's reactions and perceptions.

It is also the finding that in some cases divorced women consider divorce to be too personal a matter to disclose in the church. As we have seen, some of them kept their divorce a secret or did not discuss their marital problems with anyone, even their pastors.

I went to church every Sunday, but my faith was at a low state. My thoughts mattered more than God's. So my pride would not allow me to reveal my husband's affair to anyone.

If it was now, I would probably discuss it with my pastor, but then, I did not feel the need to. It was too much of a personal matter. As it was my decision to marry, it should also be my decision to divorce.

Divorce is not shared since it is difficult to open up with personal matters. As in this case, some matters are not only too personal, but also too painful to share and reveal.

There also exists a low expectation for the pastor and the church.

It is easy to disclose issues regarding my work or my children, but it is difficult to talk about my marriage to the pastor. I do not think my pastor would have told me anything new.

The expectation for the pastor is so low that divorced women do not feel the need to reveal. They believe it will not be beneficial to share information about their divorce.

There is not much expectation for the church either.

I was attending the same church for about five years, and my husband was there occasionally too. When I was ready to file for divorce, I did not tell anyone at the church. They are not helpful. I do not even want their help, and I do not expect anything from the church.

Although they are church attendees, the church is not considered to be a place where they can receive support and help through their divorce.

In my case, I was at this church for five years now, and there were a few couples that got divorced in the meantime. They did not seem to expect too much help from the church, so I just thought that is the way it is.

Divorced women naturally come to believe that support does not come from the church regarding divorce. By observing others, they came to understand that the church is really not helpful regarding divorce.

Besides the low expectation for the pastor and the church, it is also the finding that there is discord between the cultures, which makes it difficult to share their personal issues regarding divorce.

My church seems to have both Korean and American culture mixed together. Traditionally, I do not think Koreans are comfortable with revealing too much of our personal stories. We tend to take care of it quietly. But in Korean American churches, it is hard for your privacy to be protected.

It is pointed out that the way of Korean culture is to keep your private matters to yourself, but in the culture of the Korean American church it is different. The Korean American church tends to have a more general interest in people and their lives; thus, one's privacy is invaded at times. This is one difficulty divorced women face regarding sharing their stories and being supported in the church.

### Perception of Divorcees

The above section reported findings regarding divorced women's attitude towards the church. This section will deal with how divorced women have experienced the church's perception of them. Divorced women experience both biased and unbiased perception from the church; however, biased perceptions were reported more frequently than the unbiased. The findings generally show how the church has disparaged the

divorced women. It often is found that divorcees were stereotyped, due to the rigid definition of what a family should be. Divorced women often compare themselves with another singles group in the church, the widows, because they feel the church's perception of the two single groups differs.

Although the finding of a biased perception was dominant in numbers, divorcees also shared their experience of unbiased church.

People are Americanized here. Divorce is not a big deal to them. They sometimes do think like Koreans, but they did not treat me any differently. They did not seem to think I was any different.

This case shows that in this woman's congregation, no special attention was given, as in more "Americanized" cultures. It is conveyed here that the divorcee felt accepted without any conditions attached.

When I came to this church, there was already a couple that I knew, so I got to blend in naturally. People were ready to accept me. I did not have to explain every single detail about my divorce. It was great that the church provided me a great community.

The church had lots of members, so I didn't have to explain anything about my situation. The first week I simply mentioned that I was single, and the church connected me to another single woman congregant. I got to be in her small group. I did not have to worry too much about how others thought about me.

As in these cases, church, when it has an unbiased view, can provide a community for divorced women. The experience of divorce does not receive any special attention nor does it require special understanding from anyone. The divorcees were able to fit in naturally.

There are several findings regarding divorcees' experience of a biased perspective. It is the experience of these interviewees that divorce is taken as a sign of weakness.



The church tends to think you got divorced because your faith was not strong enough. They tell you how you should have overcome your marriage problems through faith. Korean churches' bias is that faithful and holy people keep their family together, and those who lack in faith break the family. People tend to believe that even nowadays. But, that is not true. It is not because you don't know God that you are divorced.

In the church divorce is related to your strength of faith. One of the biases the church shows towards divorced women is that breaking a marriage commitment is a sign that one's faith is not strong enough. Whether divorce is condemned or not, divorce is understood as a sign of lack of faith.

The church often manifests its ignorance towards divorce in general.

The church doesn't seem to be particularly interested in the divorce topic. Maybe that is because they didn't see a whole lot of people who are divorced in the church. Korean churches seem to be busy just making the distinction between divorced and non-divorced people. They tend to think divorce is the other person's story that has nothing to do with them. I guess it could be good, since it means they don't consider divorce to be an option.

This finding points out two important points. One is that the church conveys its ignorance regarding divorce. To the divorcee, the church just does not seem to be interested enough in them. This is ignorance, since the church is not knowledgeable of divorce, and it is ignorance also because divorcees are being ignored. Another important point is that even if churches are ignorant of divorce, they still perceive divorced women differently from others.

I didn't receive any support from the church whatsoever. Korean churches really need to overcome their prejudice against divorced people. They don't know what to do with divorcees and they don't know how to approach them. There seems to exist a barrier for those women who are divorced.

Divorced persons are aware that there is a major barrier that is in place against those who are divorced. They also think the church is unclear regarding the direction of its ministry towards divorced women.

Another bias that is experienced in the church is regarding perception of what a family should be.

Even if I were married, they would think it is strange if I didn't have a child. For example, if they see a honeymooner in the church, they keep on asking them, "When are you going to start a family?" The church is too interested in your becoming a "perfect family." They are not willing to accept the family as they are; thus, they think a couple without a kid is imperfect, a divorced woman is imperfect.

In this case, interviewee is identified as imperfect, since she does not fit in the normal description of what constitutes a family. There is a rigid definition of a family, which is that it consists of both parents and children. Family in any other form is outside the normal range and, therefore, is imperfect.

One of the major ways divorced women experience churches' bias is through being stereotyped. They are identified in a certain way that may or may not explain who they are.

I was not especially aware that I was a divorcee. But a few months before I had a chance to talk with my small group leader. She was thanking me for some gift that I have given her, but then suddenly she said, "I always feel sorry for you." I was so stunned. Why is she suddenly telling me she pities me? I felt annoyed and was frustrated and thought "why do you think you are better?" Just because I am divorced, it does not mean she gets to pity me.

As this case shows, divorced women are often stereotyped as deserving sympathy.

Divorced persons are also perceived to carry atypical pain within themselves.

I visited this church and as I was introduced to the pastor, I was introduced as a person who carries much emotional pain. Why can't I be introduced by my profession or by my name? Do I really carry that much wound, just because I am divorced? I really get angry when this happens. Don't they themselves have any emotional pain? Why do they think mine is any different or more severe than theirs?

When one is divorced, only the aspect of divorce is illuminated. Other characteristics or qualities of the person are buried under the divorce identifier. Divorce is the only quality

that is highlighted. In this case, just because of divorce, one automatically becomes a person with severe emotional wounds.

Stereotyping is also applied and directed towards the divorcees' children.

My older daughter is naturally reserved and a little shy. I was the same way when I was her age, but I became more active and talkative as I got older. People look at me now and think I have always been like this, and they tell me that my daughter is too quiet because she has experienced her parents' divorce. I tell them she was always a quiet child, she likes to read books and do things by herself. But they don't believe me and I don't want to keep on explaining to them. They think my daughter is like that because she is from a broken family. I also think single parent families could have some negative impact, but you can't relate everything to that.

Children are perceived and analyzed from the fixed perspective that single parent families have a negative impact on the children. Single parent families are seen as problematic.

Another stereotyping that divorcees face is regarding them being single women who are potentially available for another relationship.

The church needs to break away from their prejudice in thinking, just because divorcees are single, some relationship could evolve with a married men.

Divorced women are looked at as a person potential for remarriage. They also stereotype divorcees in thinking that we don't take marriage or family seriously. Divorced people become someone who has done something significantly wrong.

I try hard not to look suspicious in any way. I always behave carefully.

Some wives in the church don't feel comfortable that I may be around their husbands. Maybe that is something a divorced woman has to accept. When I feel that is going on in the church, I try to become the wife's friend, and I try to stay away from the men as much as possible.

The findings show that divorcees often experience stereotyping that, because they are single, they are likely to approach men in the church. They are also perceived to be careless regarding other marriages and families; thus, they are misunderstood to stir up trouble in other marriages. Divorced women deal with these misidentifications by simply

ignoring them or accepting the circumstance. They also take caution with themselves and try not to look suspicious.

These cautious behaviors are taken not only with the congregation, but also with their pastors.

The pastor needs to change his perspective first. The pastor needs to treat us divorcees the same way he treats others. Even the pastor seems to be taking precaution when he is meeting with a single woman. He doesn't want to be misunderstood. If the pastor is talking to a single woman for a long time, people tend to be suspicious. But when the pastor talks to a married woman at length, they think it is faith consultation.

This interviewee cannot be comfortable even with her pastors. She always has to be aware of how she is perceived, or how others are perceived because of her. The single status of divorcees makes them vulnerable, which often places them in a position where they may be misunderstood.

Besides being stereotyped in the church, divorcees often see themselves being compared with widows. They realize that the church treats them differently.

The church takes great pity on widows. They are understood as needing help for independence. The church recognizes that they need to show support to the widows. I think the church thinks divorce was by choice, while the death of a husband was without choice. Widows are pitied because they experienced a crisis so suddenly. But you know it is the same for the divorcees. Some divorcees were forced to work suddenly because they were divorced one day. People tend to think that divorcees chose to divorce because they were confident they could live on their own.

The perception between divorced women and widows is greatly different. Widows in the church are accepted and understood. They are supported in every way since becoming single was not by their own choice, but was forced upon them. Perception towards the divorcee is so much different. There is the tendency to believe that the divorce was

strictly by choice, and the choice was personally made out of confidence to survive.

Thus, divorcees are less supported, understood, and accepted than widows.

### Ministry Focus

According to the findings, some interviewees experience the church as focused on certain areas of ministry in which they feel ignored and neglected. First of all, the findings show that the church's ministry is predominantly focused on married couples.

I sometimes have hard time blending in since all the church programs are centered around the married couples.

The church shows less interest in single women than on married couples. We are just unrecognized at times.

Our church went on a retreat. The first day was okay, but the second day was... I don't know, I really can't explain what it was exactly. I just felt shy and thought I must look quite lonely to others. I tried hard not to cry. But what can I do? Korean American churches are all couple-oriented, and I can't just ask them to suddenly concentrate on divorcees. I felt lonely and thought I am not coming back next year. If these church retreats are going to make me lonelier, why would I participate in such activities? Most of the attendees were couples, so the retreat must be centered around them, and that is something I need to understand and accept. The retreat dealt with communication between the couple, so I really could not take part in it.

These interviewees feel neglected by couples-oriented church ministry. They feel that they are unrecognized when all the programs are focused on married couples. They participate in the programs, but when they feel that they are geared towards couples, they feel left out. However, divorced women believe that these couples-oriented ministries are something they just need to understand and accept since most of the members of the congregation are couples.

Our church had a revival a few months ago, and during the sermon the preacher started talking about how the most beautiful scene in church is when couples and their children come out to church together. I feel sad when I hear those words, since I only come out with my kids. What can I do... I can't ask them to be aware of divorced families whenever they preach.

Others might think I am overly sensitive, but if you are in the church, you can't help but to feel that single women are not cared for. Everything is done around couples. Even the sermons are done around couples.

Feeling neglected continues regarding sermons as well as programs. The findings show that divorced women are left out even in the sermons. However, it also shows that divorced women do not actively request that sermons show an awareness of singles.

There are other experiences that cause divorced women to feel neglected.

Our church had a workshop regarding health issues. It was held at another place where the seats were all designated. Single women were assigned seats separately from the couples. At our table, there were only divorcees and widows. If they were just a little more aware, they could have avoided that mistake. This happens in wedding receptions, too. Why can't they just seat us together with the couples? I have experienced this so many times.

Divorced women frequently experience that the church's focus is simply not on them.

By certain experiences as this, divorcees feel that they are identified only by their marital status. Divorced women feel categorized, and feel that the church is careless about how divorcees must feel.

Besides pointing out the couples-focused ministry of the church, other aspects that make divorcees feel neglected were mentioned. Some shared about how the church mostly focuses on ministering to the male instead of the female.

There are limits to what singles can do to serve in the church. Since the ministry is male oriented, the ministry team doesn't really give you that much responsibility if you are a single. Even if couples serve, the husband is usually the leader and the wife just helps him out in different ways. And the process of being in leadership is faster and easier for couples.

I think the pastor and the elders are more interested in couples, because they think the male members have more potential for church leadership. So, they are generally interested in people who come as a couple. I feel that the church does not care about women who attend by themselves.

The interviewees brought attention to the fact that the ministry of the church is usually male oriented, and in some churches, leadership positions are given only to male members. This also shows that, regardless of one's ability, singles are somewhat neglected in being assigned to a certain responsibility within the church. The status of being single women limits their ability to participate.

In addition, the church's focus on evangelism seemed to receive much more attention than the divorced women.

I don't have much expectation for the Korean American church. Our church members are pretty well educated and economically stable. So they like to go to Mexico or to other parts in the world for mission. To me, it seems like they care more about what is visible. They don't care about people suffering right here.

This interviewee is pointing out how the church's outer focus is likely to neglect the people in the church.

Divorcees also felt that the church's focus was elsewhere, rather than on them.

In our church, divorced people are minorities. There are a small number of us in the church. I guess that is why the church really doesn't care about us. Also the church has the mind of the corporate world, so if it is not something visible and noticeable, they don't want to invest their resources in it.

The church is understood to be businesslike. This shows that divorcees recognize that the church does not pay enough attention to them, and they believe the reason is because the church does not believe that it is worthwhile to do so.

#### Pastoral Support and Insensitivity

The findings show that some interviewees experienced pastoral support and some others experienced insensitivity.

Divorce was a difficult decision. I sought help from a pastor, and he gave me the courage. So I was able to tell my husband that if he tries to beat me one more time, I will call the police.

Divorce, especially related to issues of abuse, is a difficult decision. But a pastor's encouragement and support enables women to make a courageous decision.

I felt that pastors were different. No matter how close the pastor was with my husband, the pastor was aware that my husband had some problems, and showed me great support.

Divorced women feel supported when their pastors understand what they are going through. They feel validated.

I had made up my mind to divorce, but before carrying out the actual steps, I wanted to get some validation, thinking my decision isn't too wrong. So, I spoke to the pastor's wife, whose judgment I trusted. She heard my whole story and told me, "What God wants is for you to be happy." I felt so understood and validated.

These comments show that pastoral support allows for validation. The decision has already been made to divorce; thus, the pastoral support was not regarding whether divorce was right or wrong. It was in regards to being centered in God.

Although some divorced women received pastoral support, there were experiences found regarding the lack of pastoral support.

My husband one day suddenly announced that he was leaving. I did not know what to say, so I called my pastor. The first response from the pastor was that I needed to prepare for any legal actions and that he will introduce to me an attorney. Then he transferred me to this other pastor. But he didn't seem to have any experience with divorce, so he wasn't helpful at all. I contacted another pastor and asked him to please meet up with my husband. Both pastors met my husband once each probably, but that was it. That wasn't what I wanted. Christ looks for the one lost sheep, and that is how I wanted pastors to think of my husband.

Facing divorce suddenly, pastors are reached; however, the divorcee does not receive the attention or the kind of support she wants or needs. The divorcee seems to have contacted the pastor out of urgency; however, it seems as if this case was not responded to with the same urgency; responsibility was passed on from one pastor to another pastor.



The pastors weren't supportive, because they just considered my divorce simply as their "work." I was so upset, but if become angry with the pastors and leave the church, it will be another loss for me on top of my divorce. So, I set my goal as to become stronger in faith. What can I do? If pastors are not willing to do anything for me, then I have to do it myself, right? I know my husband didn't have an important position at the church, nor did he have any financial impact, so maybe the pastors thought it wasn't a big deal whether our family stays or leaves. Still, I didn't think that was God's way. So, I said to myself that I am going to become stronger in faith. Maybe then, they will start recognizing me more.

This interviewee shared great resentment regarding how pastors considered her crisis simply as one of their tasks. She also felt that the church was not concerned greatly whether the family left the church or not. She felt she was not being recognized or supported for what she was going through.

I was not supported from the pastors in any ways while going through my divorce. But maybe this was God's will, so I can be well trained and become a faithful servant. The pastors regarded my divorce from their perspective. They were more concentrated on serving the whole church rather than just this one family. The church is not affected by one family's leaving, only that family is affected.

I feel I didn't receive any support. None. But I should say that I received support from the church as a whole.

In addition to the lack of pastoral support, these comments show how the interviewee tries to make sense out of the circumstance. She believes that it all may have been God's purpose to strengthen her. Despite the lack of support from the pastors, it is understood that the church as a whole supported her.

There also exists a lack of pastoral support regarding divorced women's church service.

I was in charge of the newcomers even before my divorce. I thought about giving it up after my divorce. The pastor seemed like he was uncomfortable me being there. But I decided that if it were not an assurance that God is giving me, I would not quit. Instead, I would just try to overcome people's prejudice. But then the pastor started leaving me out of certain responsibilities, the things I used to do before. When we gathered before greeting the newcomers, we took turns

praying, but the pastor would not even let me do that.

Divorce limited her weekly responsibilities. She made up her mind to overcome people's bias, but the pastor was not supportive with her decision and showed her that he was uncomfortable having a divorcee serve the newcomers. Despite her willingness to serve, the divorcee was ignored by the pastor's insensitivity.

In the following situation, the interviewee's request for help in saving her family was also ignored.

I also spoke to my child's pastor. I told him that our family is going through a divorce, and my child is skipping school and not taking any tests. I asked the pastor whether he could pay some special attention to my child. I asked him because there were limits to what I can say to my child. The pastor met with my child a couple of times and that was it. I asked him again, but he said, "I have other members I also need to take care of. They all are depending on me, so I can only care for those who are able to keep up with me. Those who don't, I cannot do much." From then on, I completely stopped asking him for anything. I think he was actually being honest with me. The senior pastor was trying to slip out of taking charge somehow, but this pastor just was frank with me. That is how the pastors felt. But for me, it was a matter of life and death, so I didn't have any other choice but to ask for their help.

In order to save her family, help is desperately sought. However, it is barely responded to and mostly ignored. In this case, the divorcee believes that pastors honestly do not think seriously about helping and supporting the family in crisis. The urgency of divorce, the matter of life and death, is not understood by the pastors.

Since then, I perceive pastors differently. I understood the pastor's lack of support not as my business but as God's business. It is something God has to take care of. God will fulfill them in some ways. I am okay now, but my heart ached so much then.

Repeatedly being ignored by the pastor, she is devastated, and the divorcee now comes to understand pastors differently. She does not look up to them anymore for support. She

believes pastors are beyond her ability and realm, so she depends on God to be responsible for training the pastors, for them to show better support.

There are also findings of pastors demonstrating their inability to care for the divorced. The divorcees' experiences included broken confidentiality, issues of reliability, and inability in counseling.

The purpose of sharing my divorce with the pastor was that I wanted him to keep it to himself and pray for me. But he shared it with others.

Before sharing anything, I think about how my story can be known by everyone else. I believe counseling should be able to protect your privacy, but I don't trust my pastor with that.

These interviewees experienced that confidentiality was broken. There is an anxiety about counseling with the pastors, because the divorcee does not believe her privacy will be protected. Pastors are not perceived to be reliable.

My husband and I tried counseling here and there. Nothing really worked, so we went to our pastor. He studied counseling before, but I don't think he was all that skillful, because he started siding with me in counseling. So, my husband was not satisfied and didn't want to go back.

The couple goes to the pastor for help, but because of the pastor's inability to stay neutral, the counseling does not work.

I finally got divorced and left the church. My previous pastor wanted to see me. When we met up, he told me, "There are lots of couples that live their separate lives even when they are married. So, even if you have to use separate bedrooms, why don't you stay in the marriage? That might be better for your children when they want to get married." I wondered what the meaning of life is then. If he had persuaded me under the biblical base, that may have made more sense. But since he was basically telling me that divorce wasn't going to get me anywhere, so just stay in the marriage, I could not accept it. My relationship with the pastor goes back a long time. I didn't expect much from him, but still, I was quite disappointed.

The interviewee is disappointed that the pastor is simply telling her to go back to her husband, based only on his opinion. Divorced women expect pastors to give a

theologically-based argument. A pastor speaking out of his own understanding of a traditional relationship between husband and wife is difficult for the divorcee to understand or to accept.

Another pastor that I met when I was about to get a divorce was my husband's friend. They said divorce is evil. They also said that an evil spirit is in me. It wasn't even worth it to pay attention. They were completely condemning me. They said they wanted to understand and help me, but they concluded that divorce was simply "evil." Who do they think I am, a little girl? I told them to leave.

This could be considered a more theological argument than the previous one; however, it is solely based on the condemnation of the divorcee. The interviewee does not feel understood or supported; therefore, this persuasion is not accepted.

#### Comments for the Future Church

Some interviewees offered opinions regarding how they want the church to be towards divorced women. Thoughts regarding support, strengthening faith, growing sensitivity, and honoring the divorcees' time were shared.

The interviewees shared much that was related to the church's insensitivity. It is only natural that divorced women want the church to be more supportive.

I would like for pastors to fully devote as much time as they can in supporting the family that went through divorce. Calling and offering to meet with each of them, and having interest in how they are doing. Just until the family is able to stand on its own.

Divorced women are asking the church and the pastors to support them through their most difficult time. They believe pastoral support during this period is critical.

Please don't change any responsibility of the person who just had gone through a divorce. If they had a position they were serving in, please let them continue with it. Don't place them in a single women's group right away just because they became a single. If it seems like the divorcee is doing her best to overcome the crisis, then just encourage them so they can continue with their work.

Showing support by being considerate of divorced women's circumstances is important. Rather than thinking from the perspective of the church, if divorced women could be considered first, they would feel greatly supported. This finding tells that divorce is already a major transition, thus, it will be important for the church to show its support by minimizing any other transition within the church.

As mentioned above, thinking from the divorced women's perspective is important in caring for them. Divorced women ask that their readiness be honored.

Rather than paying too much attention, I think it will be important to just wait for the divorcees to be ready. Some symptoms after divorce are severe enough that it requires special attention, but mostly, the divorcees recover on their own. Others just need the church to be patient with them. Especially in the Korean churches, please refrain from asking detailed questions. Let the divorcees open up when they are ready to.

Divorced women ask that their timeline be respected. Rather than trying to solve all the curiosity from the non-divorced perspective, it is asked that the recovery and the sharing will be patiently awaited. Overall, the divorcees want the church to be a comforting place.

It will be nice if the church could just treat us comfortably. Everyone has something they did right or wrong. Everyone makes mistakes. But why does my mistake have to stick out so much? Can't it be just accepted as something normal? I don't want any special attention.

The request of not wanting any special attention is repeated. Divorced persons want to be accepted by the church just as anyone else. Any special attention as a divorced person makes them uncomfortable.

Divorced women also want the church to focus on strengthening their faith.

The thing I liked about coming to church was that I got to receive spiritual help. Rather than analyzing my life and offering any secular help, spiritual help was beneficial.

The church is where some people that are in need come for help. They come to church because there is not much they can do themselves. The church should focus on helping them build a closer relationship with God.

They believe that the church's focus should be on strengthening their faith in order to assist the process of recovery.

Lastly, they ask that the sermons be more sensitive towards different forms of families.

I ask that the sermon topics be more sensitive, especially when they talk about families. Fortunately, I didn't experience it too often, but whenever family is mentioned in the sermon, I get nervous. Single parent families should not be referred to as a broken family. That will wound us greatly.

The findings show that divorcees want to listen to a sermon that is more sensitive to diverse forms of family. Especially, they resist listening to any generalization and stereotyping of a single parent family. They request that pastors be more careful in their sermons not to cause further wounds for divorced families.

### Biblical Understanding

The next category is that of the biblical understanding of divorce. The interviews revealed several biblical understandings that divorcees apply to themselves or are referred to by others. This category of *Biblical Understanding* reveals six different sub-properties (see Figure 9): *Discomfort with Scriptures; Matthew 19:6; Story of Ruth; 1 Corinthians 7:26; Romans 5:12, and; Proverbs 21:19.*

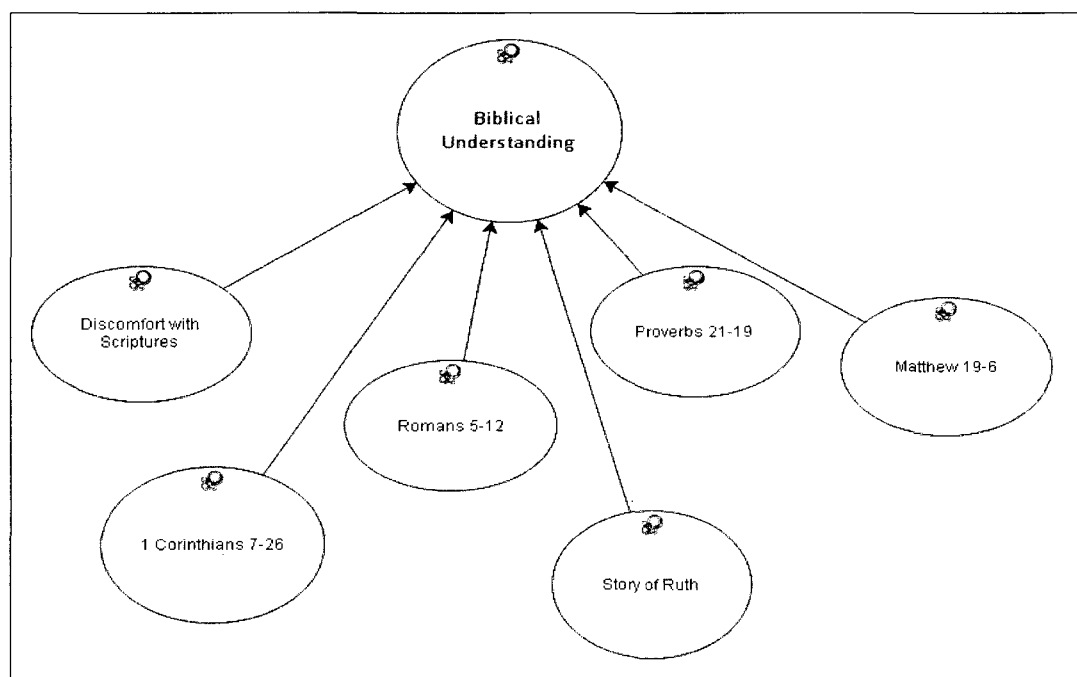


Figure 9. Category: Biblical Understanding

### Discomfort with Scriptures

The findings show that some divorced women may feel uncomfortable when they hear Scripture regarding divorce.

I don't like it when I hear those verses. I simply have sinned. I am not ashamed in front of people, because I did my best. I was truthful to my feelings that I did not want to stay in the relationship. But, before God, I feel like I have sinned since other women have endured through marriages that were worse than mine. At least what I know is that it was not good in God's eyes. I am only sorry to God. I am not sorry to my children since they are seeing a better side of me since the divorce. I am not sorry to my parents or to my ex. I am quite confident, but I know I have sinned. That is why whenever a Scripture on divorce is mentioned I get uncomfortable. I simply failed to keep the family together. Moreover, I was the one to initiate divorce.

This interviewee is uneasy regarding Scriptures that condemn divorce, not because they cause her to be uncomfortable with other people but because they confirm her own feeling of having sinned before God by breaking her family and initiating divorce. She feels confident with her choice of divorce in general, but she feels apologetic before God.

However, not all women feel such texts are authoritative for their lives.

Scriptures on divorce? Sure, I heard them before. But, whenever I hear them, I tend to think it has nothing to do with me. It is preached in sermons and talked about amongst people, but still, it is not about me. It does not matter whether divorce is talked about in good or bad ways, I am who I am. If I am okay with my life, if I am able to love others, if I am able to lend a helping hand, and be in fellowship with people, than nothing else really matters. I think the pastors are generally careful about what they say, so we will not get hurt.

In this case, the Scriptures on divorce are mostly disregarded. This interviewee believes it does not apply too much to her situation. She believes that loving and helping others is a more important criterion for her faithfulness than her divorce; she puts more spiritual emphasis on who she is and on the good she is capable of contributing.

#### Matthew 19:6

Regarding scripture dealing with divorce, Matthew 19:6 is frequently mentioned: "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (NRSV). Several interviewees shared their understanding of and experiences with this Scripture.

I feel conflicted when I hear this Scripture. The part that says, "God has joined together"..., but we weren't Christians when we got married, so.... It makes me wonder whether my ex-husband felt empty with me, that there was something he was unable to share with me. But, I concluded that this is the way God has led me.

When the interviewee hears the Scripture regarding God having joined them together, it raises many questions regarding her marriage and divorce. The divorcee thinks maybe there was something lacking in her, and that is why the marriage ended up in divorce. But mostly, divorced women believe they have made a choice that is understood by God.

If you met your spouse at church through prayer, then maybe this Scripture will mean something more. It must serve as guidance that leads the couples through. However, if you met your spouse outside of the church and didn't believe in God before, then this Scripture is just one out of many Scriptures.



For this interviewee, this Scripture applies only to those who were married as Christians. If you were not a Christian then, this Scripture does not apply. Therefore, for the couple that the Christian God has not joined together, the command has no impact.

### Romans 5:12

Romans 5:12 is another text that addresses divorce: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned" (NRSV).

Holidays get very hectic. My children have to go my ex in-laws and also to my parents. I even think about how I may not get to be invited to my own daughter's wedding. Even my parents might not get to go. Because our broken marriage reveals so much of our sin. Should I say divorce was a sin... I really resonate with how sin came through one man and through him, death was spread to all. Through my divorce, so many were wounded. The pain was spread to all.

Divorce is pervasive and has a great impact not only on the divorced women themselves, but also to those that care for them. This interviewee feels guilty regarding how her divorce had such a negative impact on her whole family and notes that this text describes this effect of divorce. She implicitly refers to herself as the first person through whom sin came into the world, Adam, and believes that she hurt others through her action of getting divorced.

### Story of Ruth

One of my interviewees was introduced to the story of Ruth as her role model. This story was suggested to her as a model a divorced woman should follow.

I often hear about the story of Ruth. How Ruth followed and obeyed her mother-in-law and accepted the faith of Israel. A person that I know used to refer to this story frequently when she was talking to me. She told me that this story applies to me, since Ruth remarries and that it leads to the birth of Jesus. ... I think she was trying to tell me that I had a husband before, like Ruth, and that I should remarry a Christian.

Through reference to this text, she feels compared to Ruth and urged to follow Ruth's example: she ought to remarry, and choose a Christian not only so she can avoid getting divorced again but also in this way show herself a servant of God.

#### I Corinthians 7:26

This interviewee refers to I Corinthians 7:26: "I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are" (NRSV).

1 Corinthians is Paul's opinion. He tells you if you are married, stay married, but if you are single, stay single. That is Paul's idea, not God's. It is said that God hates divorce, but is it ever told to not get divorced? It would have made things easier if I was a widow.

The interviewee resists the authority of this text in her life, assessing it to be from Paul and not from God, whose hate for divorce is not necessarily a commandment not to divorce. This woman takes comfort in the fact that Paul addressed divorce from his own standpoint, that it was his own opinion, and not necessarily the same as God's.

#### Proverbs 21:19

This interviewee refers to Proverbs 21:19: "It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and fretful wife" (NRSV).

A husband and a wife were together because they had love for one another. But if they don't have something that keeps them together, then it cannot be continued. I don't think it's important what people think. Where was it? Somewhere it says, it is better to live by yourself.

For this interviewee, the text serves as a spiritual counterweight to the criticisms of other people. She feels that the Scripture has affirmed her experience of her troubled marriage.

### Theological Understanding

This section reports the findings in the Theological Understanding category.

Apart from the biblical understanding of divorce, the findings show that divorced women

try to understand and explain their circumstance through various theological understandings. Under the category of *Theological Understanding*, five properties are shown (see Figure 10): *Cross to Bear*; *Divorce as Punishment*; *Keeping Marriage for Religious Beliefs*, and; *Understanding of God and Divorce*.

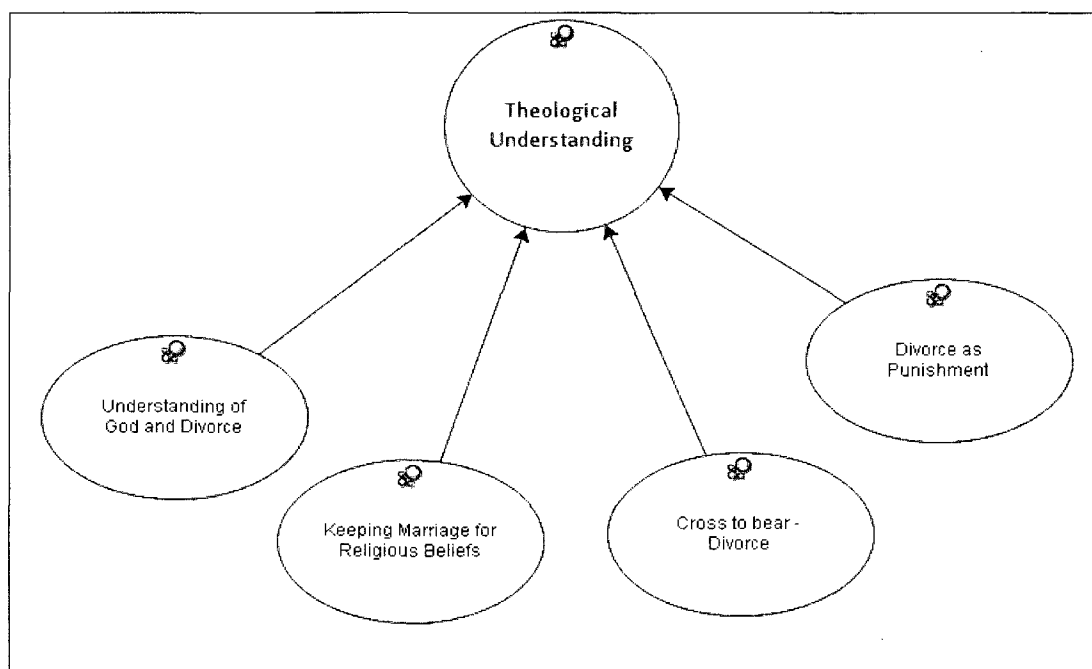


Figure 10. Category: Theological Understanding

### Cross to Bear

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (NRSV, Mark 8:34b). The findings show that taking up one’s cross is frequently mentioned in regards to marriage and divorce. Some interviewees reported that they were instructed by other Christians that the hardships of marriage were their cross to bear.

Is it true that the Bible tells you to not divorce? People who are Christians for a long time told me. Before I got a divorce, I often heard that you have to endure in marriage. It is the cross that is given by God for me to bear.

I was talking with this lady, and she told me to invite my ex-husband for the Thanksgiving dinner. She said even he is the cross I need to bear, and if do, I will be blessed.

Interviewees reported often being told that difficulties in marriage were a cross they needed to take up. They reported being told that if they would endure through their marriage, they would receive blessings from God. Not only their suffering but even the ex-husbands themselves are crosses they are expected to carry.

For this interviewee, however, the notion of bearing the cross was part of her own theological understanding.

My children wanted me to get a divorce, but I could not decide then. Since I was the only Christian in the family, I thought I had no other choice than to bear the cross.

As a Christian, this interviewee feels obligated to endure. However, there also exists an alternative understanding of bearing the cross.

At first I thought it is my cross. But the more I think about it, you should not bear this kind of cross. Why do I have to waste my energy on something that is not worth it? If I am bearing the cross, then at least between me and God, I need to be happy about what I am doing. I need to feel that this cross is worthwhile to bear. But that is not what I felt.

This interviewee decides that there are some crosses one can be happy to bear for God, and that others are a waste of her spiritual energy. Endurance needs to have worth, and this woman's experience was that there was no worth in continuing to be patient with her husband.

### Divorce as Punishment

Theologically and spiritually, some of my interviewees understand and experience their divorces as punishment. For example:

When I got divorced, I thought “I am being punished.” So, from then on, I tried to attend church every Sunday. I felt like I am being punished for following my enjoyment only.

If I lived by the Bible, then I would not have been punished. When I was in arguments with my husband, I knew that the church would tell me to stay away from arguments, but I really couldn't do it then. But when my divorce was finalized, that is when I realized if I had been more faithful, this would have not happened to me.

For this interviewee, divorce is clearly understood as a punishment for a lack of faithfulness. It is shown in this case that the divorcee believes if she had been a more faithful Christian, she would not have been punished through getting a divorce.

### Keeping Marriage for Religious Beliefs

One factor that contributed to some of my interviewees being very slow to seek a divorce was their theological notion that if they are a Christian, they should not divorce their spouse. Rather, they should endure their marriages.

Both of our families were Christians, so I thought I should just be patient with him. I think we were both abnormal. His beating was habitual, and since I was continuously beaten by him, I thought maybe I should just learn to accept this.

I became a Christian and my beliefs did not allow me to divorce my husband. But then we gradually grew apart from the church. What occurred in my mind was that I really wanted to get a divorce, but I kept on going to church, God would not let me do it. So, I intentionally stayed away from the church. Of course, I was busy too. I started attending church again after the divorce, since no one can tell me then whether to divorce or not. It would already be too late.

These women's theological beliefs cause them to try to avoid divorce and keep their marriages. It is not only traditional notions that keep the interviewees in dangerous marriages but also their own religious belief that God is against divorce. For these interviewees, no matter how harsh the circumstances were, for a long while it was something to try to accept and learn to live with, even to the point of questioning one's normality or staying away from church in order to be able to go through with the divorce.

### Understanding of God and Divorce

Though some interviewees focus on being punished by God through divorce, the views of God related to divorce were actually quite varied, and positively so.

Of course, God does not want us to be divorced. But I ended up here anyway. But, I think it is God's blessings to be where I am right now. I began to be thankful even when I was in the process of divorce.

I spoke with different pastors about divorce. Some say you can't be too quick to judge what God is thinking. Some others say God looks for what is at the center of us. How I understand this is, God said to not separate, but rather than to commit sin in your troubled marriage, it is better to divorce and search for the true God.

These understandings of God show that divorced women have a positive understanding of God in regards to their divorce. They are able to think of God as the One who blesses them even in the midst of divorce. It is also understood that God takes pleasure in divorced persons seeking God, rather than married persons committing sin.

I believe God has given me just the right life. God knows that I am at peace now. I believe I am being loved by God consistently and that I was never abandoned by God. Of course, I had wondered at times why God didn't answer my prayers. But I know that God has prepared me for this day. God knew me so well and also knew what needed to happen in order for me to believe. God prepared me so strongly that I may overcome all the troubles.

God is satisfied with me, because God wants me to be happy, and that is how I feel now.

God is portrayed here not as judging divorce or those who have made the decision to divorce, but rather as having prepared the now-divorced person for the hardships she will be experiencing. God also is pleased with her for the state of peace she is in.

Before, I constantly thought about what is the difference between the divorcee and the married woman. What was wrong with me that I had to get a divorce? I always wondered what people thought about me. Right after divorce I wondered whether God had to really do this to me. I believe I was truthful and faithful to God and the church for the last 10 years, but did God have to solve my problems

through divorce? I reached a conclusion, which was that it is all God's sovereignty. This conclusion made me feel liberated.

An answer is sought and found. Divorce is a complicated matter that causes this woman to wonder where God's will is regarding the divorce. They wonder why God has put them through divorce. One of the answers is found above. The divorcee believes that it is all God's sovereignty. Just as all matters of life and death are under the realm of God, divorce is also in God's sovereignty. The divorcee feels liberated by the answer she found.

### Forgiveness

The next category that emerged from the data analysis is *forgiveness*. Forgiveness is understood as having three different properties (see Figure 11): *Forgiveness after Divorce*; *Reaching Forgiveness*, and; *After Forgiveness*.

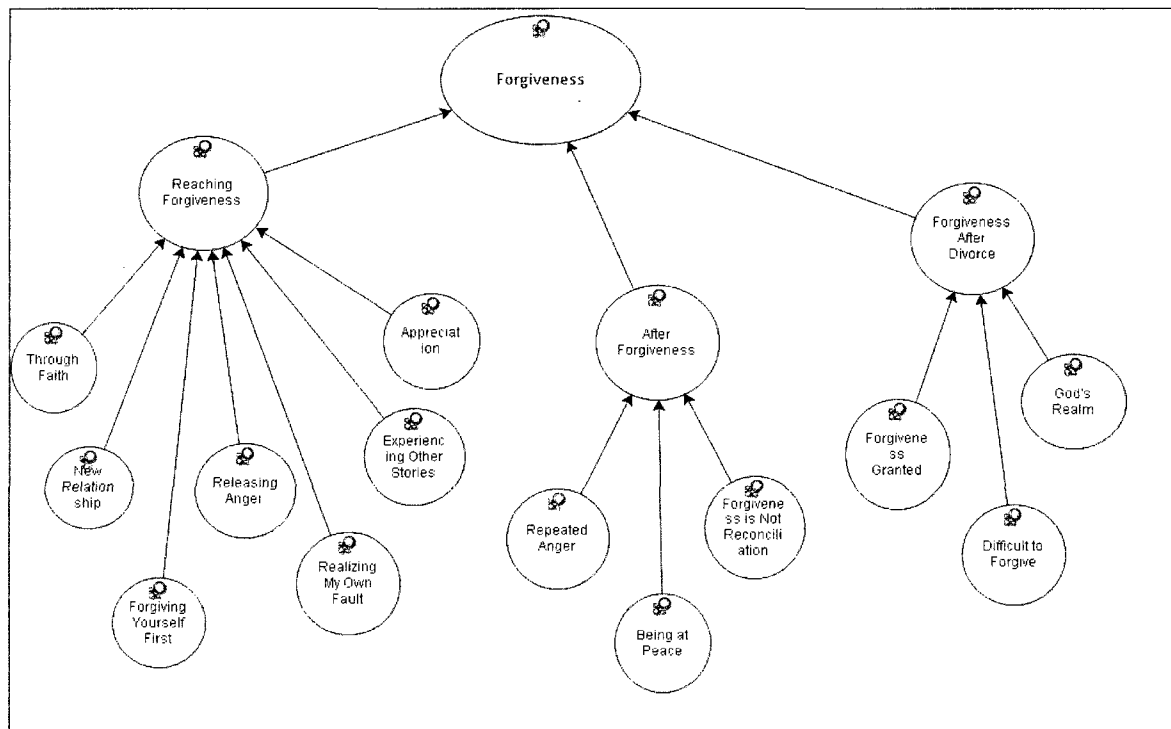


Figure 11. Category: Forgiveness

### Forgiveness After Divorce

Three different understandings of forgiveness after divorce are found in the data.

One is the understanding that some women can forgive their ex-husbands after divorce.

I forgave all. My ex-husband still calls me and scolds me, especially if there is any problem with our son. Then, I just say, "Yes, you're right." I don't say anything back. I don't try to do this, it just naturally happens. It was very difficult for me to do it when we were living together, but now I just think I can listen.

Forgiving my ex... I think that is all done. I just hope he will forgive me for the things I have done. Everything is over, so I don't need to forgive or to be forgiven.

This is not true, however, for other interviewees, who find forgiveness hard to offer.

Maybe I am a little selfish. If you believe in God, you should be able to think in a positive way, but I wasn't able to do that with my husband. Maybe I can't forgive because my faith in God is not deep enough, or maybe because he made me suffer too much.

This interviewee cannot forgive her ex-husband. She wonders if the reason for not being able to forgive is because either her faith is not strong enough or because her ex-husband's bad treatment of her was extreme.

I used to tell my ex-husband to leave if he wants to, but I actually didn't want him to, because of our children. I think the reason I can't forgive my ex is because there is nothing I received from him. If you lived together for over 20 years, shouldn't you receive some alimony or child support? Doesn't he need to be concerned about how I will live? There was nothing like that. I kept on giving him money and even I was the one who got him a room when he moved out. I heard of couples who split 30 million dollars each when they got divorced. I think my case is a little different from others'.

This woman believes she is not able to forgive her husband because even after many years of marriage and having fathered children, he shows no concern about their



economic survival. She provided financially for her husband through the divorce and even after divorce, but he left her with nothing.

Besides these views of forgiving or not forgiving, there also exists a view that forgiveness is in the realm of God.

What my husband did wrong is for God to take care of. He has succeeded in his career, but his personal life has failed. My kids all chose to live with me, they don't even want to meet their dad. I sometimes feel sorry for him, so I don't feel any hatred against him.

I don't think forgiveness is hard to offer. I can't understand why people say that. Whether we forgive or not, he and I are separate. I don't need to be angry at him. Forgiveness is what God gives; I just need to focus on my life. I will be stressed out if I think about forgiveness too much. I don't care about whatever he does. Forgiveness isn't something I should do.

These interviewees believe what their ex-husbands did wrong, or offering forgiveness, is not something humans need to be concerned about. Rather, these are matters for God to address.

### Reaching Forgiveness

The findings show that divorced women have reached forgiveness through different processes. There were several different ways in which divorced women were able to forgive their ex-husbands.

When my husband was leaving me for another woman, I kept on praying to God, but I kept on seeing my own faults instead of my husband's. I cursed my husband and his mistress, that they would get into an accident and be seriously injured. God made me realize that even the thoughts are the same as actual murdering. God made me repent of my sins, and made me realize that God has forgiven my sins of murder like this. If God forgave me and loved me, who am I to condemn others?

Our sins are just different in their types, but it is all the same before God. That is how I was able to forgive my husband and his mistress. Since then, I prayed for their well-being. I knew I was the same sinner as they were.

This interviewee has reached forgiveness through her faith. Through faith she believed she needed to offer forgiveness, just as God had forgiven her.

I think forgiveness is first of all forgiving your own self. If you can't forgive yourself, then you are not able to forgive anyone else. I think many divorcees don't like themselves. They don't regret their decision to divorce, but they just don't like themselves. If you don't like yourself, you can't forgive yourself; then you also can't forgive others. In order to forgive others your wounds have to heal first and you recognize that you are being loved by God. If you realize you are being truly loved by God, then it is easier to forgive others.

This interviewee points out that in order to forgive others, she had first to forgive herself. She first had to accept herself in order to accept others. Realizing God's love helped her reach forgiveness.

Four interviewees reported that their forgiveness was through realizing their own fault in the marriage.

When I was praying I realized that I also did wrong. Before, I thought my husband was the only problem, but I thought about how much I had also done wrong and was able to forgive my husband then.

Well, I try to understand my ex-husband. I also think I did wrong. Do you think this might be forgiveness?

I think I could have done better. Men like it when women care for them in small ways, but I don't think I did that well. I think it would have been better if I cared for my husband in a better way while we were still together.

Yes, he hurt me a lot, but I also should have been more careful. Maybe it is about 80% of his fault and 20% of mine? I think forgiveness is possible thinking it is not all his fault.

These interviewees understand that their ability to forgive came through recognizing their own faults. This helped them understand their ex-husbands as not being completely at fault for the divorce. Forgiveness was possible when they realized there was something they also could have done better.

One interviewee shares that her forgiveness was through experiencing other women's stories of divorce.

I was able to forgive my ex-husband through listening to other people's stories. When our church first organized a single women's group, I opposed the idea, because it seemed like I was being labeled in some ways. I was not too pleased with the group, but I attended anyway. But when we shared our personal stories about divorce, we began to realize that it was not only me who went through something so terrible. I realized I was not alone in this experience. I thought divorce was a stigma that I had to live with forever, and limited myself in getting along with too many people. Through our sharing I realized that some experiences of divorce were worse than mine. So, through sharing our experiences and empathizing with one another, I matured and got to see things in a different way. I thought my wounds were the biggest, but I noticed they were not.

By listening to other stories of divorce, this divorcee gained a new perspective for her experience. She recognized that her pain of divorce was not exclusively her experience, and that others went through something even worse. This enabled her weight of divorce to be lifted in some ways, which made forgiveness possible.

There are also two interviewees who shared their appreciation for their ex-husbands, which led to forgiveness.

After all these years, I became thankful for what he has done. At least he worked really hard to support our family while we were still married. He also was really a good father to my kids. I tell people that he was a good man. His last decision to leave was wrong, but now I am able to accept what he has done right.

Until a few years ago, I used to get angry when I talked about my ex-husband. My friend kept on asking why I could not forgive him, even when I consider myself a Christian. She said she forgave her ex-husband. I know what she is trying to say, but I kind of got annoyed at this. Back then, when I talked to my ex-husband for some kids-related reasons, my pain and loneliness were all stirred up and got me really upset. It was hard to have a conversation in a pleasant voice. However, this all changed from last year. I am able to pray for him and be thankful that he is a good father to my kids. He really cares for our kids. There are lots of fathers out there who really don't care, right? Although our kids don't live with their dad, they still are loved much, which I think is better than only being loved by me.

One other interviewee shared how her release of her pain and anger enabled her to let go of all her feelings of pain and forgive her husband.

After sobbing for a long time, I got to pity my husband. Other times when I wanted to cry, I would cry in the shower, but that day I went to the park at nighttime and totally sobbed. Nobody was there, so it was really good to cry out loud. It felt like all my pains were being washed away. All my expectations, anger, hatred towards my husband also washed away.

This divorced woman felt a sense of relief after she released her emotions, which allowed her to have different emotions toward her husband.

There was also a case where the divorcee shared that her new relationship enables her to let go of the past.

If you find someone you love and begin a new relationship, then you are able to have a much more comfortable relationship with your ex-husband. I was in conflict with him, but since I have somebody new, I want him to enjoy his life, too.

She was able to release her anger and let go of her past since she started a new relationship, even hoping that her husband will also experience enjoyment in his life.

#### After Forgiveness

Going through different processes in order to forgive, divorcees also reported their feelings after offering forgiveness. Two interviewees shared that they felt peaceful after forgiving their ex-husbands.

If I didn't forgive, my faith wouldn't be as strong now. I feel at peace. I can face him and even smile at him these days.

I became so peaceful after forgiving him. I believe forgiveness actually benefits me. I have come to realize that forgiveness is not for him but for me, because I was the one to be released from all my burdens.

These interviewees had a sense of peace after forgiveness took place. Another interviewee allowed for the possibility that her sense of release and relief from the burdens of her marriage might be evidence of forgiveness.

Other divorcees are left with some money or asset, but my ex-husband didn't leave me anything. I just feel relieved that he is gone. I don't know whether this is forgiveness or not.

However, three other interviewees reported having feelings of repeated anger even after they offered forgiveness.

Even after I forgave, I noticed there is still a piece of anger remaining. I feel fine, but suddenly I get angry at my ex-husband for leaving me. It is okay when all my work gets done pleasantly, but when I feel too tired and busy, the anger suddenly arises. I get angry at him for making me go through all this. I am sure I have forgiven him. But I think forgiveness has to be repeated. I feel that under certain circumstances forgiveness is not completely granted. If someone asks me if I completely forgave my ex-husband, I don't know what to say. I think I did. That is what pastors always talk about, isn't it?

I thought I had forgiven him, but with certain things I think I am still angry.

Forgiveness is so hard to do. I thought I had completely forgiven, but the root of my anger is still there. I think some divorcees tend to rush into forgiveness just because they want to be free from the burden. They believe that forgiveness is simply not having hatred towards their ex-husbands. But if some big problems come up, they blame or feel angry with their ex-husbands, and if they hear their ex-husbands are doing so well, they also get upset. I don't think that's forgiveness.

These interviewees have felt forgiveness for ex-husbands, but feelings of anger come back every now and then, especially when they are under certain stress. Thus, they feel that forgiveness is an on-going process. Some are uncertain why anger keeps surfacing even when they feel they have had forgiven. Others are sure that angry emotions linger because of rushing into forgiveness.

Two interviewees stressed that forgiveness is different from reconciliation.

I forgave my husband. But I really can't understand people who want me to get back together with him. I really don't want to.

I take pity on him, not as my ex-husband, but just as a normal human being. I was angry with him because he was my husband before, but he has nothing to do with me, so I just pity him. I am also thankful that he is our children's father, and wish him well for that same reason. Some tell me that I really didn't forgive him since I am not taking him back, but I don't believe that. That is not true.

These interviewees experienced the expectation of others that forgiveness should lead to reconciliation with their ex-husbands. However, these divorced women believe forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. They can forgive and appreciate some things about their ex-husbands, but forgiving does not require returning to the marriage.

### Aloneness

The next category is that of aloneness. Aloneness is understood as having two different properties (see Figure 12): *Loneliness* and *Solitude*. The interviews revealed several understandings of loneliness and solitude.

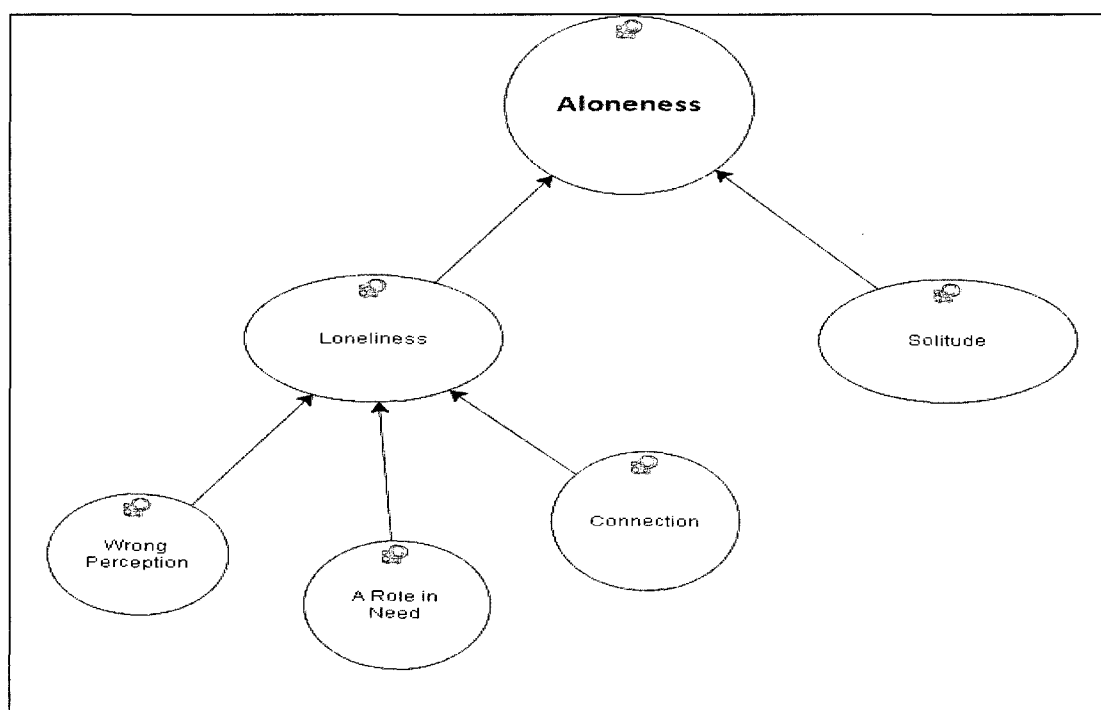


Figure 12. Category: Aloneness

## Loneliness

Seven interviewees reported that they felt lonely as a divorced person. Out of seven divorcees, four of them explicitly mentioned loneliness. One aspect to pay attention to here is that these four respondents were all between the ages of 51-60.

I feel lonely these days. My life was too busy until now, so that I really didn't have time to be lonely. But now that I have some time on my hands, I think I feel lonelier than before.

Until five years ago, I didn't have time to be lonely. But sometimes during the holidays, when my kids are all busy with their own friends, I feel lonely.

I feel lonely since I live by myself. My co-worker, who is also single, says she's lonely, too.

Since I run a business, I feel financial difficulty at times, and that is when I feel most lonely. When everything runs smoothly, I feel fine, but when things get a little difficult at work, I feel like I am by myself. Moments like then, I would like some support, but since I need to manage everything on my own, I feel helpless at times. When I feel helpless, I think about my father and cry, wishing he could have raised me to be stronger at heart. That is when I feel emotionally exhausted and lonely.

These findings show that when life is occupied and busy, divorced women feel less lonely. But, when they have a lot of free time, when they are not getting the support they need, or when they face difficulty at work, they feel lonely and hope for some support.

Loneliness is at times about physically being alone.

For me, loneliness is not about having someone to have sex with. It is just about being in an empty space. I hate being by myself in an empty house.

If you become my age, a sex partner is not what you want. You just want someone to carry on a conversation with. When I go home the first thing I do is to turn on the television. Before I couldn't understand people who did that, but that is what I do these days. I am sometimes not even watching it, but when I am by myself, I turn it on anyway. I just like that it makes some kind of sound.

For these two divorcees, loneliness is about physically being by yourself in a space where there is no one else. It is interesting that both of these divorcees mentioned that, rather

than wanting someone who could fulfill their sexual needs, they want someone as a companion.

Out of seven interviewees who addressed loneliness, three respondents were between the ages of 30-45, relatively younger than the previous group. One commented on the misperceptions of others.

People think being divorced is extremely lonely, but according to my experience, I don't think I am that lonely.

Another interviewee does not deny her loneliness, but puts it in context.

I may feel lonely maybe a couple times a year? Christmas perhaps? But it is nothing I cannot overcome, because I have my son who is still young. I always think about how he feels and try to make him feel better. That gives me comfort in return.

Loneliness is not too much of a focus for this interviewee because she has a child to rear. Despite all the complicated and difficult issues that accompany a single mom's child rearing, comforting him is a comfort to her.

Some interviewees spoke of feeling lonely, but noted that loneliness does not only apply to divorced women; rather, loneliness is also understood to be a common feeling for all people, regardless of being married or divorced.

At first, I was pretty surprised to be alone, since I was usually together with my ex-husband. When I felt lonely, I had friends around. There generally is loneliness in every human relationship. I felt lonely even when I was married, especially when we would have arguments about certain things. That made me lonely since I didn't understand my ex-husband and he didn't understand me. Also when I had to sacrifice myself for him, not being able to do the things that I want to do, that brought me loneliness, too.

I don't think my loneliness is any different from other people's. My friend who is married tells me she often feels lonely, too. People tend to think, since divorcees live alone, they must be lonely. But, in some areas, singles have less stress to deal with. So, I don't think there is too much difference between married people and singles.



Summarizing thus far, an older age group of interviewees openly acknowledged feeling lonely; having more time to themselves and children all reared, they felt lonely when they were physically alone. Loneliness was also regarding not having a husband to emotionally depend on for support. A younger age group also reported loneliness; however, it was perceived to be something they could overcome, and a feeling common to all human beings, whether they are divorced or married.

Loneliness has an aspect that yearns for connection. Interviewees expressed their need for connections with other people.

I get a little nervous whenever I go on business trips. My business trips are mostly educational conferences, so I always gain lots of new information and meet lots of new interesting people during my trip. I also get to experience new cities, too. So, when I return from the trip, I am a little excited and energized. But when I start driving my car out of the airport, within five minutes I find myself crying, because I don't have someone at home to share all that excitement with. Here I am with new experiences and new encounters, but no one to share that with at home. It was really hard to deal with. It's not as bad as before since I can share somewhat with my children, but back then they were too young. Coming back from the trip, I would go pick up my kids at a friend's house, but even there, I can't simply start talking about what an exciting business trip I had. I have to listen to their story about how the kids were while I was gone. So, for several years I was worried even before going on a business trip, since I knew that I would feel the same way and cry again when I return. This lasted for a while. This is loneliness, right?

This interviewee felt lonely when she could not fully share her feelings with anyone. She yearned for a person who could listen to all her new and exciting experiences. She anticipated loneliness, knowing that she would have that feeling upon her return home. She also felt lonely when, rather than attending to her own feelings and needs, she had to provide care for others.

I mostly don't feel too lonely. I try to exercise regularly and meet often with friends and family. The more I age the more I want to know about other people. I want to form more human relationships. I want to share their ideas and mine. I

admire some people and think how great they are. I want to fulfill what I don't have and want to learn from them.

This woman does not speak of loneliness but does emphasize her eagerness to build a relationship with people in general. She yearns to know about others and their thoughts.

One thing that is important to single women is having fun, but I don't feel like I am having too much fun. Married couples seem to have fun when they go out with other couples, but since I am alone, it is not that much fun. I want to have more of an exciting life, such as going to sports games, but since I am by myself, I don't have much opportunity to do that.

This interviewee is longing for more activities in life, but she believes she has fewer opportunities since she is a divorced single woman. She feels that her choice of participating in social life is limited because she is alone.

Loneliness is at times felt in other ways. Two interviewees reported how there are times when the role of a husband is needed.

Loneliness is something a little uncomfortable. I wanted to go on a group tour this Thanksgiving, but the tourist agency told me that since I am by myself they will call me later if there is another person who request to go alone. My kids are all grown up and don't want to go with me. If I go on those group tours, participants are mostly couples. It would be good to have a husband then.

The interviewee feels lonely because she feels limited in what she can do as a divorced single woman. She feels that it would have been easier to do certain things, such as going on a trip when she wants to, if she was not divorced.

I don't feel too lonely or pity myself for being alone. Even these feelings I believe God gave them to me. Of course when there are couple gatherings and when I am cooking and serving a big meal at the church I feel the need of a husband. It would be good if he could be there and help out with heavy stuff, not to mention that it would also look good to other people. I don't think this is really loneliness, but it feels emotionally a little sore.

This is also the case where the husband's role is needed. The divorced woman hopes that the husband's role could have been fulfilled at times. Her ex-husband's void is felt, which brings her to feel emotionally sore.

Obviously, there also exists an opinion that perceiving all divorced women to be lonely is a wrong perception.

It is wrong to think divorcees are lonely. Of course there may be some divorcees who are lonely. I think those who can't stand loneliness have different ways of dealing with it; some women involve themselves in meeting different men, while some concentrate on their outer appearance. But, most of the divorced women around me don't seem to have time to be lonely. They enjoy being single and seem to be satisfied with their life. That offers me the assurance that my decision to divorce wasn't too wrong. Most women endure till they can, so they don't have regrets when they split up. I don't think people should think of divorced persons as being lonely. Of course, people's perception doesn't matter too much to me.

This interviewee feels that divorcees do not tend to think of themselves as lonely; thus, it is a wrong perception to think most divorced women are lonely. In her opinion, although some divorced women deal with loneliness through men and their own outer appearance, many others lead a satisfying life.

### Solitude

Another aspect of aloneness is solitude. Three interviewees shared their thoughts regarding solitude.

Of course I enjoy being by myself. If I still was together with my ex-husband, then I still wouldn't be able to have my own time; I have to attend to his needs, such as preparing meals for him. But now, since I'm divorced, I come first. I move according to my plans and my schedule. I enjoy my solitude. I like this feeling.

The interviewee feels she is now able to attend to her needs rather her husband's. She can prioritize herself in life. She feels pleased having times of solitude.

I intentionally take time away for myself. I have the custody of my son, so I have to use long hours to take care of him. So, when I feel like I need to be by myself, I choose to be in solitude and enjoy my time of being alone. Loneliness... as time goes by, it becomes naturally immersed in me. If I feel too lonely I may have wasted too much time thinking about it, but I think I am able to use my time wisely. My time of being alone gives me opportunity to think more and deeper, being relaxed even more.

She enjoys her time of being alone. She feels her solitude enables her to manage her time more wisely and makes her feel more relaxed. She does not deny loneliness; moreover, she has naturally accepted loneliness to be a part of her, but rather than spending too much energy on it, she focuses on solitude and tries to make that a part of herself as well.

There also was an opinion that was against solitude.

I don't want to enjoy solitude. Why choose solitude when you can share together and gather with people? If you have time to feel solitude, I think you should rather spend that time talking with people on your phone. If you give up, it's too lonely.

This interviewee resists the idea of solitude. She believes solitude makes people too lonely and signifies giving up; thus, she believes more energy should be spent in connecting with people.

### Post-Divorce Issues

This category reports the findings of some issues that the interviewees have dealt with after divorce. Among several post-divorce adjustment issues that they currently experience or have experienced in the past, four properties are shown (see Figure 13): *Financial Stability; Social Status; Pervasive Pain, and; Psychological Problems.*

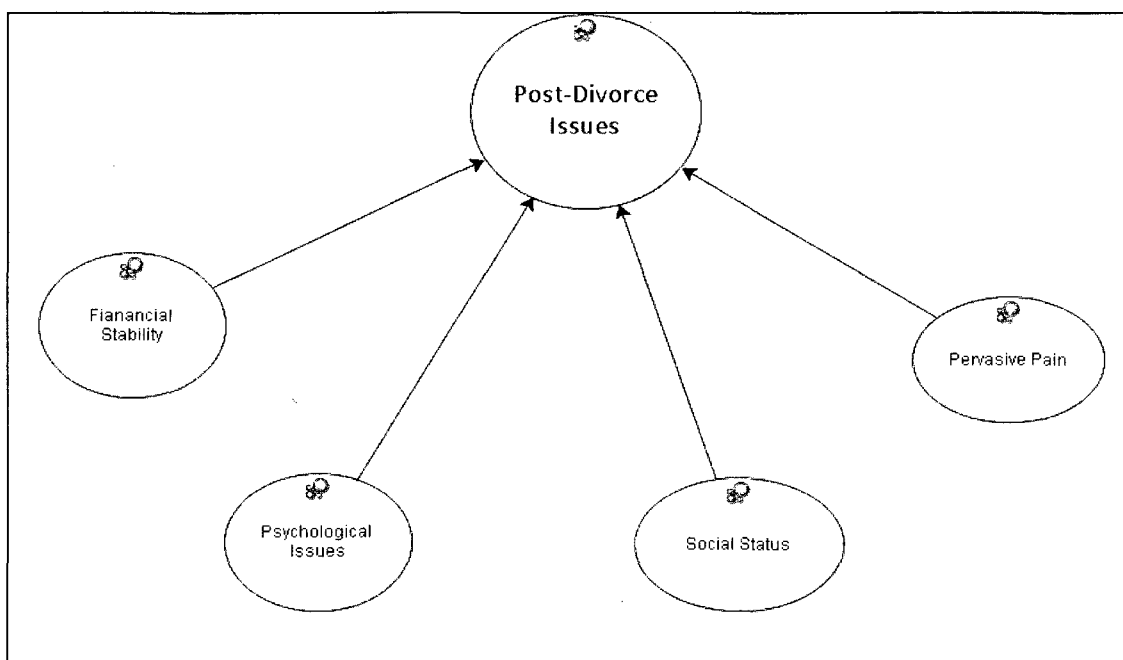


Figure 13. Category: Post-Divorce Issues

### Financial Stability

The findings show that financial stability is one of the major issues in post-divorce adjustment.

When we moved into an apartment after our divorce, my children didn't want to unpack for quite sometime. They didn't want to live there and frequently asked me if we could move to another place. They kept on asking why we had to live in such a bad apartment. They wanted me to buy a nicer car, too. Their school was right across from our place, but they would go around the block to get to their school because they were embarrassed by the apartment they lived in.

Divorce changed her financial status, allowing her and her children to make limited choices. She was forced to downgrade her living situation.

Financial stability was so important to me after I got a divorce. I didn't have time for myself, because I set my goal very high. Maybe that is why I always felt dissatisfied. But financial stability is important, because if you don't have money, you lose confidence. Others might have found pleasure in God, but money was important to me then.

This interviewee states that financial stability is important for her. She also reports that she was not satisfied while attempting to reach her highly set goal. Still, it was important to have financial stability, which allowed her to keep her confidence.

Women hesitate to get divorced because they don't have the financial means. I think I was able to be more confident of myself because I earned money. I didn't need to depend on my husband for money. Whether you separate from your spouse or become a widow or a divorcee, you need to have financial stability.

Another interviewee also reports that her financial stability offered her confidence. She also suggests that she was able to make the decision to divorce more confidently since she did not need to be financially dependent on her husband.

### Social Status

One of the interviewees shares that divorce has affected her social status.

After I got my divorce, I was greatly disturbed by encountering people. I wanted to avoid them as much as possible. Since I was so well respected before, divorce hurt my pride so much.

When I was getting my divorce, rather than feeling relief of being freed from my ex-husband's violence, I was more concerned about my social status falling. I honestly regretted divorce and thought that it may have been better to endure his abuse only if I could keep my social status. My wealth and my fame were things that kept me going, so I was afraid that everything would vanish with my divorce. But, looking back now, what would have happened if didn't get a divorce? I think I made the right decision. But before, it surely seemed like divorce was bringing me down completely.

This interviewee describes that loss of her high social status because of divorce was so painful that she was distracted from the relief of being free of her husband's violence.

This loss was so great for this woman that at one point she regrets not enduring her abusive husband.

### Pervasive Pain

One interviewee shares her feelings about the deep wounds of divorce.

The wound of divorce lasts for a long time. Things have settled down; I now have the custody of my children and also have someone I'm seeing, but the wound is still there. My wish was to live again with my children. My wish came true. It was heartbreaking when my husband took my kids away. It felt like I was bombed. My dad didn't want to support me financially, so I could not raise the kids. My dad was against the idea of me taking care of the kids.

This interviewee was not able to have custody of her children because her husband exploited her financial vulnerability, which was made worse because neither would her parents provide financial and emotional support to her. Her woundedness from divorce was exacerbated by not having custody of her children so that she could raise them.

After my divorce, I used to argue with my mom, because I thought she didn't understand what I was going through as a divorcee who didn't have the custody of her children. But now I regret it. I feel so bad that I hurt my parents as well. They were also wounded from my divorce, and knowing this it really hurts me. It has been awhile since my divorce, but the more I live, the more the wounds are revealed. Why wouldn't it? There will be my kids' graduation and marriage. Which side of the family will get to be present? Just because you glue back the broken glass, it doesn't mean the cracks don't show. It's spilled water.

No matter how much time has passed, the wounds from divorce exist for this woman. It is pervasive. The wounds are revealed whenever there is a chance to be reminded of it. This divorced woman feels not only her own pervasive pain but also the family members who are affected by the divorce.

### Psychological Issues

Two interviewees reported having psychological issues after divorce.

I was so depressed and, right after my divorce, I was so nervous about carrying on my life. I was worried about what kind of facial expression I should have when I meet with people. My self-esteem was totally low.

Because I had low self-esteem, I didn't want people to pity me after my divorce. I wanted to show people that I could still be confident even after the divorce, so I paid a lot of attention to how I looked.

These women experienced depressed mood and low self-esteem after their divorces.

Notably, both also felt anxious about her physical appearance, not wanting to

communicate her inner struggles through her outer appearance.

Besides depressed mood and low self-esteem, there are more severe psychological issues these interviewees deal with.

I hate men. I hate it even when they come next to me. Even in the church, except for the pastor, I detest any men acting nice to me. I think this is pathological. I need to accept them as brothers in Christ, but I just can't. Not yet.

Since her divorce, this woman has come to abhor men. She assesses her feelings as pathological and in need of change, but she is not yet able to relinquish these feelings.

I am so shocked by everything that has happened, that I cannot think straight. I feel so dumb. I always forget and don't remember things. I think I might get cancer or deal with Alzheimer's disease.

I have high blood pressure and diabetes. But I am psychologically more hurt. I had a severe depression. I didn't want to think about my divorce, so all I did was sleep. When you sleep, you don't have to think about complicated stuff. People thought I was dying.

Some of the song lyrics say your heart aches, but I really experienced it. It really hurt. I needed sleeping pills to sleep. I got better. I even attend church.

This interviewee, who has recently been divorced, experiences severe depression as well as some other physical symptoms. According to her sharing, divorce was too shocking to her, and it has caused her to suffer physically and psychologically.

### Positive Outcomes of Divorce

A final category that emerged from the data concerns the positive outcomes of divorce. Though there are many issues that need to be dealt with in post-divorce adjustment, there also are findings that interviewees see positive outcomes of divorce.



The category of Positive Outcomes of Divorce has three properties (see Figure 14):

*Gaining Perspective; Recognizing the Positives, and; Freedom.*

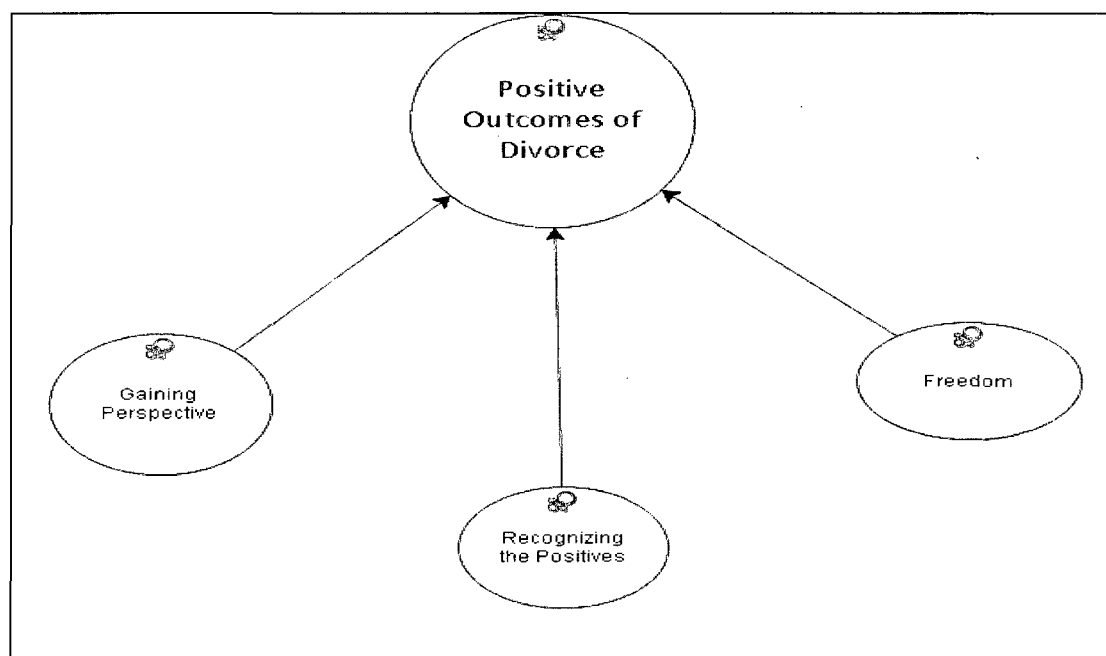


Figure 14. Category: Positive Outcomes of Divorce

### Gaining Perspective

A divorced woman describes the positive outcome of her divorce as gaining perspective.

If I didn't get divorced, I think I still would have kept on partying at our big house. I would have totally lived a worldly life. I now have the burden of being divorced, but I don't think I would be the person that I am today if I wasn't divorced. Even if I am divorced, I am healed in my faith, and I feel my faith in God has become stronger. I thought divorce was like falling off a cliff, but I am recovered now. I think it was right to divorce. This is not just my personal confidence, but I really feel no shame in God now.

This interviewee is pleased with how she recovered from her divorce and gained a stronger faith. Through the experience of divorce, she is able to feel better about herself than before. She gained a new perspective for herself.

My kids have friends whose parents are divorced. It occurred to me one day that if I wasn't divorced, I may have stereotyped them as divorced parent's kids. But since I am divorced, I am able to better understand what they go through. I feel

like I have gained more in my life through divorce. Of course, I had to go through more than what ordinary people go through, which left a major wound in me, but I gained something in return.

This woman is able to better understand other people's pain since she experienced her own. She has gained a perspective for understanding others.

### Recognizing the Positives

Interviewees share that they were able to form a stronger relationship with God through their divorce.

When my ex-husband first told me he was leaving, I thought about my choices. I could either lose everything, or hold on to something that I could. I was losing my husband, but I didn't have to lose my faith altogether with him. So I decided to hold on to my faith in God. What I was going through felt like I was being soaked in rain, and I needed an umbrella, a spiritual umbrella, to keep me from being more wet. From that day on, I never missed one single Sunday. Looking back, I see that my faith has grown and matured a lot.

After all these years, I am able to realize some positive aspects of my ex-husband; he was a diligent man; he was very good with our kids; and he supplied everything so I didn't have to work until the divorce. His last decisions were wrong, but I am able to see what he has done well. I believe this is possible through my growth in faith.

The interviewee shares that divorce has made her strong and mature in faith. Through her faith, she is able to recognize and remember the positive side of her ex-husband.

### Freedom

Freedom is reported to be one of the positive outcomes of divorce.

I was a little depressed right after my divorce, but I now think I made the right decision, not just because I had financial stability, but also because I am able to engage in-depth with my children. Most of all, I now have freedom. When I was still married, I didn't even dare to go shopping or meet up with a friend when my husband was home. But, now I am free to do whatever I choose to do.

This interviewee experiences physical and emotional freedom through divorce. This freedom allows her to make her own choices.

When I see other women who suffer because of their husbands, I feel so free. I don't have those worries anymore. Besides, everything is for me to decide, whether it is my use of time or my kid's education.

This interviewee echoes the previous woman's feeling of freedom to make her own choices. She is also free of worrying about her husband.

I can sleep as long as I want to, and I so love that. Before, I would have to get up early in the morning and fix breakfast and pack lunch for my ex-husband, but I am free from all of that.

Another interviewee feels the freedom of not having to do chores for her husband.

Although there are other consequences of divorce, freedom, which is shared as a positive outcome of divorce, is an aspect that is gained through divorce.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The previous chapter reported the findings of the data collected from the individual in-depth interviews. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings. Discussion of the findings is presented in two major sections. The first section offers a grounded theory regarding the experience of Korean American divorced Christian women. Each category is reviewed and elaborated upon, and relationships between the categories are explored. This discussion of the categories' integration, interactions, and interrelationships, grounded in data collected through the interviews and presented in a narrative form, yields a grounded theory of Christian Korean American divorced women.

The second major section discusses the data in light of three hermeneutical perspectives: pastoral theology, feminist and womanist emphases within pastoral theology, and RCT. Throughout the discussion, there will be an intentional effort to construct a pastoral theological framework for the care and counseling of Christian Korean American divorced women.

#### Grounded Theory

##### Review of the Categories

My research set out to explore the experiences of Korean American divorced Christian women. Research questions were addressed in the data collection, and the result was a wealth of data derived from the stories and experiences shared by the interviewees. From the data analysis, nine main categories emerged: *Traditional Notions*; *Decision Making*; *Divorce and the Church*; *Biblical Understanding*; *Theological*

*Understanding; Forgiveness; Aloneness; Post-Divorce Issues, and; Positive Outcomes of Divorce.* Each of the categories will be briefly examined here.

Within the category of *Traditional Notions*, properties such as *marriage* and *embedded notions* were reported. The interviewees often referred to the beliefs regarding marriage that were traditionally enforced in the Korean culture. Two such notions frequently mentioned are: once you get married you become your husband's family, and you have to live until you become their ghost, and; you must endure through marriage no matter what. They were not only aware of these notions, but they also tried to live by them at some point. These notions affected divorcees' decision-making, in that they felt guilty for refusing to play the traditional role of wife under painful marital circumstances. The findings show that not only were these notions embedded in the divorcees themselves, but also that these notions were imposed upon them. Divorcees frequently were blamed for not enduring through the marriage and for breaking up the marriage and family.

The category of *Decision Making* had four properties reported: *hesitancy in decision; regrets in decision; divorce for survival, and; confidence in decision.* As mentioned above, in order for Korean American women to make the decision to divorce, they have to deal with the traditional notions that sometimes bind them. Thus, hesitancy in decision-making was reported. The main reason in hesitating was because of children, out of concern that their children would be somehow disadvantaged by the divorce. Decisions to divorce were reported to be thoroughly thought through. Women resisted getting divorced as long as possible. In some cases their physical conditions did not allow them to linger any longer, so that they had to make the decision to divorce for their

own survival. Eight out of 15 interviewees answered that they were confident with the decision they made. Three interviewees responded that there are times they regret their decision.

*Divorce and the Church* included findings regarding three aspects of experience in the church: pastoral insensitivity in caring for the divorced; and negative bias of the church towards divorcees. There were also findings that revealed the church's support during their hardship of divorce, and that fellowship among divorced women in the church is empowering. Divorcees' impression of pastors regarding their divorce was that most pastors were ill-equipped and failed to provide appropriate support and validation. Divorcees dealt with negative perceptions within the church, but they generally had low expectations for the church. Some divorcees accepted the fact that the Korean American church is male-dominated and couple-oriented, while some raised questions regarding such focus.

Findings in the category of *Biblical Understanding* show that some divorcees feel uncomfortable whenever they hear Scripture being mentioned regarding divorce. Some divorcees feel they have sinned before God by initiating divorce or being unable to avoid family break-ups. However, others believe that their choice to divorce is understood by God. Some Scriptures are understood to affirm their choice.

In regards to *Theological Understanding*, two main theological perspectives are reported. One is the view that understands divorce as a punishment from God and marriage as a cross to bear. God is understood to be against divorce. Another perspective sees God as the One who blesses them even in the midst of divorce. God is

portrayed as not making an actual decision regarding divorce or condemning the decision that is made; rather, God is understood to have prepared the divorcees for the hardships.

Three main properties emerged in the category of *Forgiveness*: *forgiveness after divorce*; *reaching forgiveness*, and; *after forgiveness*. Two divorcees said they have forgiven their ex-husbands for sure, whereas two others said it was hard for them to forgive. There also were two reports that said forgiveness should come from God, not from humans, so they withheld their position on whether to forgive or not. The divorcees shared many different ways they were able to offer forgiveness. Their faith enabled them to see that divorcees themselves were forgiven of their own sins by God, so it was wrong to withhold their forgiveness from their ex-husbands. Forgiving themselves first was one way they could offer forgiveness. Divorcees were also able to forgive by listening to other divorcees' stories, releasing their anger, or through finding a new relationship. Even after forgiveness was offered, there were mixed emotions reported. Three divorcees were able to be at peace since offering forgiveness, and three other divorcees experienced repeated anger within themselves, especially when their life circumstances became stressful. This made them wonder whether the forgiveness they offered was inauthentic, and whether they had more feelings to resolve. Divorcees also shared their clear understanding that forgiveness is different from reconciliation: just because you forgive your ex-husband, it does not mean that you have to reunite.

The category of *Aloneness* is understood as having two aspects: loneliness and solitude. According to the data, interviewees reported that they felt lonely as a divorcee. The older interviewees mostly referred to loneliness as being pervasive in their lives. The younger interviewees had a more positive outlook on loneliness. They considered

loneliness not to be too serious and as something they could overcome. Loneliness was portrayed as noticing the absence of their husband, and also as yearning for connections. Whatever feelings were evoked by loneliness, solitude was acknowledged as an important part of divorced women's life.

All the previously mentioned categories also emerged from *Post-Divorce Issues*, but this category specifically groups other remaining issues of post-divorce adjustment that were not included in other categories. Financial stability and social status are threatened through divorce; thus, for some divorcees, maintaining financial stability was considered important. Even after many years of divorce, the pain and wounds of divorce were pervasively felt in some divorcees' life. Depression, low self-esteem, and physical illness were some of the health issues divorcees faced after divorce.

Finally, *Positive Outcomes* were reported from divorce. Some interviewees reported that they gained more perspective for themselves and for others. For some, their faith has matured, which enables them to recognize the positive aspects of others. Another positive outcome is that divorce gave to some of the interviewees freedom to make their own choices in life.

#### Interrelatedness of the Categories

The understanding of *Traditional Notions* is a critical component in understanding the post-divorce adjustment of divorcees. The category *Traditional Notions* is formed through Confucian and patriarchal culture, and it impacts divorcees' understanding in all the categories. Depending on how one perceives divorce traditionally, *Decision Making* is impacted. *Traditional Notions* also impacts *Divorce and the Church*, how divorcees understand themselves within the church, as well as how the church perceives and cares



for divorcees. If a divorced woman believes she is guilty of breaking up the family, this belief likely impacts and reflects her *Biblical Understanding* and *Theological Understanding*. *Biblical and Theological Understanding* impacts the understanding of *Divorce and the Church*, as well as *Forgiveness*. The relationship of *Divorce and the Church* and *Forgiveness* is also associated with divorcees' possible *Positive Outcomes* or any remaining *Post-Divorce Issues*. *Aloneness* also affects *Positive Outcomes* or *Post-Divorce Issues*.

The category of *Traditional Notions* is at the core of Korean American divorced women's post-divorce experience, which influences all divorced women's experience. *Traditional Notions* impacts divorced women's *Decision Making* process. According to how they understand their own divorce in light of the traditional Korean norm of a married woman, Korean American divorced women either hesitated to divorce and may now live with regrets, or were confident to make the decision of divorce. The church's understanding and care of the divorced is an important part in the life of Korean American divorced women. *Traditional Notions* also influences *Divorce and the Church*, affecting how divorced women perceive church and how the church perceives divorced women. It also influences whether divorced women experience pastoral support or neglect, as well as the focus of ministry tending to be on married couples rather than singles [yes?]. *Biblical Understanding*, *Theological Understanding*, and *Forgiveness* are also identified as factors in divorced women's experience. While divorced women were uncomfortable hearing the Scriptures that emphasize partnership between the male and the female and the theology that focuses on sin and punishment of divorce, most of them found comfort in faith, understanding, and Scripture that affirmed and validated their

experience and divorce status. *Forgiveness* offered and experienced in various ways by the divorced women also impacted other remaining categories. All the categories dealt with so far are a part of divorced women's experience that affect how they view their *Aloneness*, *Post-Divorce Issues*, and *Positive Outcomes*. *Aloneness* was experienced not only as being lonely, but also as honoring one's solitude. Other *Post-Divorce Issues* remained, such as psychological, social, and financial issues. Korean American divorced women also acknowledge *Positive Outcomes of Divorce*, because they gained new perspectives and freedom through divorce.

In conclusion, the grounded theory of Christian Korean American divorced women developed in this research project can be summarized as follows: Korean American women's divorce is significantly related to Korean traditional cultural notions regarding gender roles and marriage. Korean American women tend to understand themselves through the lens of this traditional notion. Similarly, other Korean people and cultural institutions tend to perceive divorced women through these lenses. Traditional notions affect divorced women in every aspect of life and post-divorce adjustment.

### Three Hermeneutical Perspectives on Empirical Findings

#### Discussion of Findings from the Perspective of Pastoral Theology

In this section, I will discuss the findings from a pastoral theological perspective. In addition to general analysis of the findings from a pastoral theological perspective, I will also argue for a pastoral theology that is specific to Korean American divorced women's context. As I have defined in chapter one, pastoral theology is used here as an overarching concept that includes pastoral care and counseling. Pastoral theology refers specifically to the theological discipline that focuses on theories, practices, and methods

of pastoral care and counseling as a response to the situation of concrete human experience. I have reviewed pastoral theological perspectives in regards to divorce in Chapter 2, specifically by Oates, Oglesby, Patton, and Ahn, a Korean pastoral theologian. I agree with their perspectives that acknowledge the church's neglect of its pastoral role to nurture and care for the divorced women. But I will build on their work to address the extensiveness and pervasiveness of effects of divorce in Korean American women's lives and also to assert that concepts of shame, guilt, and sin must be sensitively understood in terms of their effects in the Korean American divorced women's contexts.

Throughout the examination of the nine categories and their properties and sub-properties, it is possible to notice that the effects of divorce are both extensive and pervasive. The term "extensive" is used to indicate the wide effects of divorce, while "pervasive" refers to the depth of effects on the divorced women. Divorce has an extensive effect on Korean American divorced women. Traditionally, the husband or the husband's family primarily initiated divorce for "socially sanctioned" reasons, but Korean society has rapidly changed recently, and the Korean American divorce rate has become one of the highest among various ethnic groups. Nonetheless, Korean families continue to embody a form of male dominance up to this day, and divorce is still a relatively new phenomenon. Due to such rapid societal change, people are still adjusting to this new phenomenon. In this context, social stigma is attached to Korean American divorcees. There exist strong prejudicial attitudes toward divorced women. The divorced woman is stigmatized as failing to be a good wife and a mother. She is perceived to have failed to fulfill this ideal female goal. The divorced woman sometimes even receives negative judgment from her own family members since she has allegedly brought shame

to them. Divorce has a broad influence on Korean American divorced women, since they deal with strong social stigma.

The extensiveness of divorce in Korean American women's lives is well manifested in several categories from the findings. The category *Divorce and the Church* shows many areas where divorced women are notably reminded of their divorce status within the Korean American church; they experience negative stereotyped and biased perceptions. The experience of divorce also is affected by the Korean American churches' ministry focus being mostly on married couples. The category *Aloneness and Post-Divorce Issues* also manifests the extensive experience of divorce. Loneliness, as an aspect of *Aloneness*, is felt throughout the lives of divorced women. *Post-Divorce Issues*, such as financial and psychological problems, continue to exist among Korean American divorced women.

In addition to the experience of divorce being extensive, the effect of divorce is pervasive in Korean American divorced women's lives. For Korean American divorced Christian women, one place where the effect of divorce is most deeply felt is the church. The research findings of the category *Divorce and the Church* not only reflect the extensiveness of divorce, but also the pervasiveness of it. This category has shown how divorce is pervasively felt through the neglect and stereotyping of divorced women by the church. Rather than shielding divorcees from the pain of societal stigma and caring for them, the church manifests stereotyping of the divorcees through its male-oriented and couples-oriented ministries and biblical and theological understanding that excludes divorced persons. The study also revealed how divorced women in the church do not receive adequate care and pastoral support. Instead, these women were getting special

unwanted attention and sympathy, and most interviewees shared that they have not received the kind of pastoral support and care they wanted.

However, whether the church is supportive of divorcees or not, the findings show that the church is a significant place for post-divorce adjustment. Some findings of the study show that those who reported they have made the post-divorce adjustment fairly well and are able to share more positive outcomes, consider the church as the critical place for their recovery process. In order for the church to work towards being a place where extensiveness and pervasiveness of divorce is validated, a pastoral theological perspective needs to be emphasized. In chapter two, pastoral theological views were discussed regarding divorce and the church; they argued that the church's perspective should be shifted, moving away from ignorance about divorce and discussions of divorce as "right and wrong." Rather, churches should focus on the needs of divorced persons. Also, the church should bear the ambiguity and dilemma that divorce presents and should share the burdens of the divorced women and accompany them in their sufferings. Patton emphasized the pastoral aspect of being with people where they are and urged the church to move forward in caring for the divorced.

The Korean American church needs to provide care based upon this pastoral theological understanding. The perspective needs to be focused on the person, the divorced women, where the church's care ought to begin. The burden of divorced women needs to be shared. It is not only the divorced women's personal failure in marriage; it is the church's failure as a whole. It is not only the divorced women's who experience personal and social disconnection; it is collective disconnection. It is not only the divorced women's responsibility to deal with the extensiveness and pervasiveness of

divorce; it is the whole church's responsibility to care for it. The Korean American church needs to bear the burden of divorced women altogether, collectively, caring for them from where they are.

A second pastoral theological emphasis relative to the findings concerns the concepts of shame, guilt, and sin, and how these components are critical in understanding the experience of Korean American divorced women. The categories of *Divorce and the Church*, *Biblical Understanding*, and *Theological Understanding* show how divorced Korean American women understand their divorce experience. Although there exists a view that accepts understandings that resonate with their divorced context, coming to terms with biblical and theological validation of their current status, the findings show that a majority of the divorced women view divorce as a sin and feel guilty and shamed by it. No single finding was reported as to how the church explicitly and directly spoke of a theology of sin regarding the breaking of the marriage law; however, divorced women internalized this message from the Korean American church, based on its ignorance about and biased perception and attitude toward divorced women. It is important to consider the issue of shame and guilt when understanding Korean American divorced women's experience. While shame and guilt are feelings any divorced woman might experience, they will surely be explicit and pervasive in Korean American divorced women.

Traditional notions that are embedded in the Korean culture and the Korean people need to be understood within the context that the embedded Confucian and patriarchal belief has required women to endure through their marriage no matter what, and if they do not, they are to be blamed for breaking up the family. Divorced women

feel shame for not living by the norm in traditionally enduring through the marriage, and also feel guilty for breaking up the family. Andrew Sung Park offers a valuable insight regarding shame and guilt for the Korean American divorced women. Although Park's explanation of shame and guilt is not explicitly geared towards any certain population, it can be applied to the context of Korean American divorced women. Park asserts that shame is about having "discomfort in facing others because of one's own vulnerability," and guilt is "an awareness of having done wrong or having committed sin."<sup>142</sup> Guilt is felt when the wrongdoer has experienced "internalization of the moral values of the society."<sup>143</sup> Park explains that the both wrongdoer and the wronged can experience guilt and shame. Shame is experienced due to humiliation, failure and disgrace, while guilt has legal, ethical, and religious dimensions.

There are two critical points to consider when understanding shame and guilt in light of Korean American women's divorce experience of divorce. First is that traditional Korean cultural notions intensify the feeling of shame and guilt in Korean American divorced women. It is obvious that they feel both shame and guilt, in the sense of humiliation, failure and disgrace. They also feel guilty at an ethical and religious level. Divorced women feel the shame of humiliation in believing that they have done something dishonorable and inappropriate. They also feel a sense of failure and disgrace because of their divorce. Ethical and religious guilt derives from divorced women's understanding that divorce is ethically and religiously wrong. In order to understand better the experience of Korean American divorced women, attention has to be given to

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<sup>142</sup> Andrew Sung Park, From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 35, 45.

<sup>143</sup> Park, 35.

the fact that these feelings of shame and guilt are intensified by the Confucian and patriarchal cultural expectations that women ought to endure through any hardships and hold the family together. Christian women carry these understandings and feelings into a religious dimension that leads them to view themselves as sinners.

Another crucial point to consider when understanding Korean American divorced women's feeling of shame and guilt regarding divorce is that they see themselves as wrongdoers. Park explains that shame and guilt are experienced both by wrongdoers and the wronged. In the categories *Traditional Notions* and *Divorce and the Church*, the findings show that Korean American divorced women experience blaming within the Korean cultural norm and ignorance from the church. These women understandably know themselves as having been wronged, but the majority view them as wrongdoers. Traditional expectations of the culture would also be related to this view. Since divorced women are stereotyped and blamed in traditional Korean culture, these women internalize these cultural norms to see themselves as the wrongdoer.

Another important concept in understanding Korean American women's divorce is the theological understanding of sin. To examine the notion of sin is important since it affects post-divorce adjustment and outcomes. The issue of sin is deeply related to traditional Korean cultural beliefs. The Confucian and patriarchal beliefs that are embedded in the traditional notions also influence biblical and theological understandings of Korean American divorced women; together, they intensify one another. Traditional belief is combined together with the understanding of biblical and theological understanding that because divorcees did not bear the cross of marriage they were punished through divorce, and thus, they are the sinner.



Are divorced women really sinners? Did they really commit a sin because they divorced? How one understands and defines sin is crucial; it could either nourish or harm one's wholeness and well-being and affect the outcomes of divorce. In chapter two, when the literature on the morality of divorce was reviewed, different perspectives existed, from views that considered divorce as a failure and a sin committed, to understanding it as an opportunity for women to reconstruct their lives democratically and as equals. Although these views largely agreed that divorce should be chosen in life-threatening situations, divorce was mostly viewed as a sin since it was breaking the marriage covenant, and commitment and sacrifice were to be emphasized over divorce.<sup>144</sup> These views simply regard the act of divorce as the breaking of a covenant and commitment. However, both Park and Young Sil Choi, a Korean feminist theologian, argue that sinners should be defined differently according to the teaching of Jesus.<sup>145</sup> They assert that sinners be understood as the poor and the weak, the marginalized and the oppressed. In this sense, Choi points out that sinners are in need of protection and the grace of God.<sup>146</sup>

While I have no intention of rebuking divorced women's understanding of themselves as sinners, I do argue that the understanding of divorced women's sin be redefined, since the traditional perspective of divorced persons as sinners is imposed from the culture and the church. I am not arguing that all divorced women are free of all sin committed, but they need to reflect seriously on their understanding of sin if divorce is the main reason that they see themselves as sinners. From the findings of the data, we

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<sup>144</sup> Arguments of David Thompson and Won Ha Shin.

<sup>145</sup> Choi, 45-61; Park, 104.

<sup>146</sup> Choi, 55.

can see that there were divorced women who were the initiators of divorce because of their husbands' violence, as well as those who were forced to divorce at their husband's initiation. Despite these circumstances, both groups of divorced women felt shame and understood themselves as sinners, breaking up the family. The traditional Korean cultural belief that is embedded in Confucianism and patriarchy, together with the biblical and theological understanding of the church that insufficiently considers the meaning of sin in Jesus' teachings has imposed a view of divorced women as sinners. Thus, the definition of sin needs to be redefined for the Korean American divorced women.

As well as the divorced women's need to reflect on their understanding of themselves as sinners, I am also arguing that Korean American churches must rethink and revise their view of divorced women as sinners. Park states that sin has two levels: individual and collective. He writes:

At the individual level, sin is a personal offense against God and God's creation, appearing as selfishness, a superiority complex, oppression, and exploitation. At the collective level, sin is a communal aggression, such as the ethos of cultural dominance, a racial superiority complex, physical pride, exclusive ethnocentrism, and nationalism. The collective level of sin includes a structural aspect that sustains such sources of sin as laissez-faire capitalism, racism, sexism, hierarchy, and humanocentrism.<sup>147</sup>

The Korean American church has committed communal sin by manifesting structural ignorance towards the divorced Korean American women. The Korean American church has been highly centered in married heterosexual couples, failing to include and validate divorced women's experience and their life. Already oppressed by the Confucian and patriarchal notion that tends to blame the woman in case of divorce, Korean American

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<sup>147</sup> Park, 32.

divorced women have experienced another kind of oppression by the Korean American church.

Having discussed above the communal level of sin, I ask: What is the pastoral theological response that is appropriate to the care and counseling of Korean American divorced women? Pastoral theologians have offered a valuable perspective on the church's responsibility. Oates points out that the epidemic of divorce needs to be considered not only as an individual problem, but also as a concern for the whole of the church.<sup>148</sup> If divorce is a failure, Oates teaches us to consider it as the whole church's failure. Oglesby offers a similar view that divorce is a communal responsibility.<sup>149</sup> Patton emphasizes the role of being pastoral, not only being with persons where they are, how they are, feeling with and caring for them, but also taking strong initiative to study the situation of divorce in order to provide a useful presence in the midst of the struggles.<sup>150</sup> Ahn acknowledges the avoidance and neglect of the church regarding divorce and emphasizes the need to focus on those who need support and care.<sup>151</sup> Thus far, pastoral theology argues for the church's communal responsibility to take care of divorced women. In addition to these pastoral theological perspectives, the extensive and pervasive experience of divorce for Korean American divorced women, and the importance of understanding the shame, guilt, and sin of divorce in light of traditional Korean cultural norms, are crucial in understanding and providing pastoral care and counseling to the Korean American divorced women.

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<sup>148</sup> Oates, 107.

<sup>149</sup> Oglesby, 284.

<sup>150</sup> Patton, 242.

<sup>151</sup> Ahn, 94.

Based on the discussion of divorce in light of pastoral theology, I suggest a few working principles for the Korean American church and the clinical practitioners. The church needs to acknowledge that there has been neglect in caring for the divorced. Whether the neglect was intentional or unintentional, the church's acknowledgement of its neglect will allow divorced women to feel cared for by the church. Then the church also needs to implant a ministry that is specially geared towards this certain population. In the report of the findings, divorced women shared that the churches' divorced women's group was a prominent part of their recovery, but at the same time, some others reported that they reject the idea of being specially categorized and receiving any special unwanted attention. Thus, rather than implanting a unilateral and fixed type of ministry for divorced women, the church needs to reflect with divorced women upon what best suits their needs. For clinical practitioners, when encountering clients who are Korean American divorced women, the issues of shame, guilt, and sin needs to be explored. As was mentioned above, Korean American divorced women are bound to receive some type of cultural and religious criticisms. Even the divorced women themselves may not be aware of how much these critical elements affect their lives and thought processes, but when the issues of shame, guilt, and sin are examined, this will likely enhance their recovery and well-being.

#### Discussion of Findings from the Perspectives of Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology

Findings of the research and a grounded theory of Korean American divorced women can be examined further through feminist and womanist pastoral theology. By referring to feminist and womanist pastoral theology, I mean a theology that is sensitive

to women's experience and perspective, how it is validated and is at the center of understanding. Further, feminist and womanist pastoral theology both are concerned about the role patriarchal culture plays in women's lives. Womanist pastoral theology addresses racist, sexist, and classist culture, challenging the tendency of white supremacy and privilege in feminism. Hence, both systems of thought serve to remind us that cultural aspects, as well as racism, sexism, and classism, need to be taken into consideration in order to understand Korean American divorced women's experiences. Miller-McLemore emphasizes a critical analysis of the social structure and its ideologies that label people as inferior and superior based on gender.<sup>152</sup> Neuger points out that feminist perspective is built out of the experiences of those who are disadvantaged by the cultural and power dynamics, and demands not only the individual, but the whole patriarchal culture be transformed.<sup>153</sup> Doebling asserts that poststructuralist, contextual, and pragmatic views and factors be adopted in identifying the sources and norms that shape women's identity.<sup>154</sup> Snorton points out the negative and stereotypical responses that derive from sociopolitical realities of sexism, racism, and classism that are distinctive to African American women's lives.

Such feminist and womanist pastoral theological perspectives are helpful for considering the social structural ideologies and the contextual factors that are prevalent in the lives of Korean American divorced women. Doebling explains being poststructural and pragmatic as taking multiple meanings and contextual factors into consideration

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<sup>152</sup> Miller-McLemore, 79.

<sup>153</sup> Neuger, 92-3.

<sup>154</sup> Doebling, 98-104.

when understanding life experiences.<sup>155</sup> What are the sources and norms that form identity in Korean American divorced women that need to be understood through a poststructural and pragmatic view? First, definitely, are the Confucian values that are deeply embedded in the Korean culture. Confucianism is a religion and a philosophy that has influenced far more Korean people through its values than any other religion or philosophy.<sup>156</sup> Confucianism emphasizes patriarchy and hierarchy that constructs a linear structure according to age, gender, and class within the social and family system. By strictly emphasizing these rules, inequality among the relationships take place. Under the Confucian rules, women are lower in class and inferior by gender. Angella Son points out that Confucianism held a low opinion of women and taught values such as *hyun mo yang cho* (emphasizing submissive wife and sacrificial mother) and *nam jon yu bi* (emphasizing superiority of men and inferiority of women).<sup>157</sup> Son also emphasizes that Confucian virtues were to maintain harmony in life, in which “women’s definition of selfhood under the influence of Confucianism was obedience in all directions of life.”<sup>158</sup> Confucianism, simply said, is a tradition that attempted to preserve social harmony at the cost of women’s oppression and sacrifice.

The category *Traditional Notions* that impacts all other categories shows well how these Confucian values are embedded in the Korean society as well as in Korean American divorced women themselves. A feminist and womanist perspective on Korean American women will take into account the cultural influences on such women's decision

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<sup>155</sup> Doebling, 98, 102.

<sup>156</sup> Angella Son, “Confucianism and the Lack of the Development of the Self Among Korean American Women,” *Pastoral Psychology* 54, no. 4 (2006): 328.

<sup>157</sup> Son, 328.

<sup>158</sup> Son, 328.

making. No one is likely to make a quick and easy decision to divorce; rather, Korean American divorced women hesitate to divorce for reasons that are cultural. They worry about their children's future, that they will receive some disadvantage as a divorcee's child. Korean American divorced women are aware of their culture that stereotypes a divorced woman as being problematic since she chose not to play the traditional role of a wife. For Korean American women that carry the Confucian responsibility of keeping the harmony of the family and being submissive to their husband while being sacrificial for their children, the decision of divorce, whether by their own initiation or their husband's, is an extremely difficult decision and has relational consequences that are potentially devastating. This particular contextual factor of Korean American women debating their decision, and the amount of time and effort spent in trying to endure through marriage only to avoid divorce, needs to be considered when understanding the experience of Korean American divorced women. Boyung Lee restates the importance of harmony in the Korean community. She writes:

Those who pursue only their own benefits are easily expelled from Korean human relations. In order to create harmony in community life, each member is expected to suppress her/his own desires and emotions and to give heed to other's desires and emotions at the same time. If an individual attempts to do things in an idiosyncratic way, or is too ambitious, he/she is alienated from the community.<sup>159</sup>

Under Confucian and patriarchal values, breaking the harmony by choosing to divorce is understood as a selfish act. According to Lee's explanation, a wife and a mother is expected to suppress her own desires and emotions in order to bring harmony to the family and the community. But, under the Confucian understanding, a divorced woman

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<sup>159</sup> Boyung Lee, "Caring-self and Women's Self-esteem: A Feminist's Reflection on Pastoral Care and Religious Education of Korean-American Women," Pastoral Psychology 54, no. 4 (2006): 344-45.

has pursued her own emotional struggle and has chosen to follow her desires and emotions; thus, a divorced woman deserves to be alienated from the community. This is the reason Korean American divorced women are perceived to be selfish, being stereotyped and ignored by the Korean community as well as the Korean American church. Nevertheless, before criticizing or alienating any Korean American divorced women, the social structure and the contextual factors need to be taken into consideration. In light of feminist and womanist pastoral theological views that validate women's experience from the poststructural view, it is wrong to criticize and stereotype Korean American divorced women while being ignorant of the Confucian influence that expects the maintenance harmony at the cost of women's oppression and sacrifice.

Along with the Confucian values, another crucial contextual factor that is prevalent for Korean American divorced women is their lives as immigrants. Feminist and womanist pastoral theology offer valuable systems of thought in examining Korean American divorced women's lives in a culture embedded in patriarchy, racism, sexism, and classism; though both endeavor to include cultural and ethnic differences, nonetheless, neither feminist or womanist theory speaks conveys the particularity of Korean American women's experience. Even more important, both feminist and womanist perspectives have awareness of the cultural contexts in which women are located, but they are insufficient to explain the immigrant women's experience. The experience of being immigrant women should seriously be taken into consideration since this experience affects so profoundly who Korean American Christian divorced women are and how they are. Therefore, I would like to take these perspectives further, so that the experience of Korean American divorced women as immigrants will be illuminated.



As immigrant women, the Korean American women's experience of divorce has extensive ramifications. As I indicated earlier, this study focuses on first generation Korean American divorced women. First generation means to be Korean-born and then having immigrated to the United States. First generation Korean American divorced women are located in the cultural context of living as an immigrant. In addition to all the issues that non-immigrant divorced women may face, immigrant divorced women face additional complicated issues, such as the pressure to acculturate, a lack of English skills, unfamiliarity with the American legal and social service systems and, often, a social support network diminished because of the views of divorced women we have been discussing. As women of color, Korean immigrant women may experience some greater economic hardships. The category of *Post-Divorce Issues* reveals that Korean American divorced women experience financial and psychological issues, which need to be examined and understood from the cultural context of being an immigrant woman. Thus, these factors need to be considered in understanding how extensive Korean American women's divorce experience is.

One other important aspect in understanding Korean American divorced women in their immigrant experience is alienation from their native country. Though immigrant Korean American divorced woman have a sense of alienation in the U.S., these women may also feel alienated from their own country at times. Jung Ha Kim writes that Korean Americans feel lonely and feel as if they are "Koreans in America but Americans in Korea."<sup>160</sup> Kim asserts that Korean Americans feel the double ambivalence that comes from the culture that they currently belong to and also from the culture they left behind.

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<sup>160</sup> Jung Ha Kim, 93.

Immigrant Korean American women feel alienated when they face racism from the culture they currently belong to, and also feel alienated when they notice the culture they left behind keeps on changing, not being the same as it used to be. Thus, Korean American divorced women's experience needs to take into consideration this sense of alienation that is deeply placed in their lives.

Some suggestions of working principles for the Korean American church and clinical practitioners can be made. The church needs to intentionally provide more opportunities for the divorced women congregants to actively engage in dialogue regarding their life and faith that promotes more awareness for their context. The Korean American church often manifests a one-way stream in dialogue, in which mostly those in leadership position speak and the majority of the people just listen. Simply listening can provoke thoughts and emotions too, but when individuals have more opportunities to engage in dialogue, voicing their thoughts and emotions, there is a tendency to actively reflect upon their context and bring their situation into consideration. Everyone has thoughts and feelings to share. When more chances are given for their voices to be heard, one's own situation will be better reflected upon. Clinical practitioners need to take into account the contextual factors affecting the divorced women. It is likely individuals will see and judge marital struggles apart from their social and cultural context. If churches and clinicians emphasize the contextual factors, the social and cultural issues are illuminated in a way that is more understandable for all. Also, it is important for churches and clinicians to bring the context of Confucianism, patriarchy, and immigration into focus in order to help clients seek and build up their well-being.

### Discussion of Findings from the Perspective of Relational Cultural Theory

Discussing the findings of the research in relation to RCT offers a critical perspective for understanding how culture makes Korean American divorced women's experience distinctive. RCT is a theory and a therapeutic model that is geared towards understanding women's development from women's psychological and cultural perspectives. RCT's core idea is that all growth occurs in connection, that all people yearn for connection, and that women in particular develop through growth-fostering relationships that are created through mutual empathy and mutual empowerment.<sup>161</sup> RCT also emphasizes the cultural aspect of women's experience and is concerned with how culture influences relationships. Thus, throughout this section, Korean American divorced women's yearning for connection and the experience of disconnection will be discussed, as well as Korean American women's communal culture and the need for special concern for keeping the balance between the individual and communal aspect.

Connection and disconnection are important concepts in RCT. RCT argues that all humans, especially women, develop and grow in relation, and that is why connection plays a critical role in women's development. Nevertheless, disconnection is prevalent in our lives and our culture. Disconnection, according to Jordan, can be divided into acute and chronic disconnection.<sup>162</sup> Acute disconnection is where growth-enhancing relationship is still the primary stage, where one can express and name the disconnection that has happened. There are feelings of fear, sadness, anger, and depression that are associated with acute disconnection. Chronic disconnection takes place because the

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<sup>161</sup> Jordan and Hartling, 48-70.

<sup>162</sup> Judith V. Jordan, "Relational Awareness: Transforming Disconnection," in The Complexity of Connection: Writings from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute (New York: Guilford Press, 2004), 50.

relational context is not mutual or growth-enhancing. The predominant feeling at this point is fear. Jordan explains that a natural response to fear is to turn to others for help, comfort, and protection, but what we experience is something quite different. She writes that “when others have been nonresponsive or worse yet, abusive in the face of our need and vulnerability, we are left feeling wounded, and we question the wisdom of turning to others in times of need.”<sup>163</sup> Experiencing nonresponsiveness and abusiveness in chronic disconnection, not only does one become vulnerable and wounded, but one also questions whether one can expect any more help, comfort, and protection. With this understanding of disconnection in mind, the Korean American church and culture will first be examined.

It is true that the findings show that the Korean American church is a place where connection and disconnection both take place. However, for the interviewees, the church is a place where they experience more disconnection than connection. RCT’s core idea is that people yearn for connection, and that women in particular develop through growth-fostering relationships that are created through mutual empathy and mutual empowerment.<sup>164</sup> Divorced women yearn for connection in the church. And in a few cases, the findings report that they were empowered by the church and its fellowship. Nonetheless, it is also important to examine the disconnection that was experienced by the majority in the findings. In order to promote connection, there has to take place an examination of what brings disconnection in the first place. RCT states that when one’s experience is not validated and response to one’s feelings does not take place, disconnection occurs. Most of the findings regarding the category *Divorce and the*

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<sup>163</sup> Jordan, “Relational Awareness,” 50.

<sup>164</sup> Jordan and Hartling, 48-70.

*Church* were that church was not a place where their experience and voice was heard or validated. When one's experience is not validated and response to one's feelings does not take place, the individual keeps aspects of herself out of relationship in order to keep the relationship. This process of disconnection impedes the woman's development. If we consider that post-divorce adjustment consists of growth and development within oneself, the church is impeding the adjustment by not validating and responding adequately to the experience of divorced women. The church needs to examine how it has been causing disconnection for the divorced women by failing to validate their experience.

Korean American divorced women have experienced disconnection, not only from the church, but also from the culture that stigmatizes divorced women. Miller and Stiver emphasize that RCT is concerned with how culture influences relationship in general.<sup>165</sup> Social factors that affect a person are an important part of RCT's human understanding. If the cultural aspect is ignored, each person's experience has to be understood in light of the dominant perspective, making an individual's particular experience fit into the dominant frame. The culture that is centered around male power and married heterosexual couples is individually and collectively dominant and does not validate divorced women's experience, story, decision or voice. Within this culture, divorced women's experience is understood only through the dominant perspective, making their experiences seem abnormal and problematic.

Having examined the Korean American church and the culture's role in causing disconnection, Jordan's idea of chronic disconnection needs to be discussed. If chronic disconnection occurs in a relational context that is not mutual or growth-enhancing, it is

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<sup>165</sup> Miller and Stiver, 21.

possible that Korean American divorced women are experiencing chronic disconnection through the Korean American church and the culture. Throughout the findings of the study, especially regarding *Divorce and the Church* and *Traditional Notions*, Korean American divorced women were not able to articulate fluently and congruently their needs. Compared to the wealth of data that was mentioned in regards to how they were stereotyped and neglected, the expectations for the church and the culture were mentioned minimally. Korean American divorced women mostly responded that church was naturally focused on married couples. They felt uncomfortable to make any specific request regarding their context of divorce, so they accepted the ministry focus on married couples.

Also, Korean American divorced women accepted the traditional Korean cultural norm that women are to hold the family together. They accepted the criticism blaming them for breaking up the family. Korean American divorced women simply internalize and endure the blame and ignorance, whether it is from the church or the culture. This is what chronic disconnection looks like. Korean American divorced women are so used to being chronically disconnected that they do not have expectations for the church and the culture, or even if they do, they do not voice their concerns. In their family lives, these women have gotten used to asking for help, comfort, and protection, only to experience abuse or no response. Korean American divorced women have so adapted themselves to the vulnerability and the wound that chronic disconnection brings that they have ceased asking for help.

In addition to the prevalence of disconnection for Korean American divorced women discussed so far, the importance of culture is another crucial factor and concept of

RCT that needs to be considered when understanding Korean American divorced women. The main cultural aspect that constitutes the Korean culture is that it is communal. Choi Hee An, a Korean American pastoral theologian, articulates that Korea has traditionally kept the communal mentality, and from a Korean mind-set, the notion of independence is considered a selfish act that threatens the community.<sup>166</sup> In the discussion of findings related to feminist and womanist pastoral theology, it was already pointed out that Koreans, under the influence of Confucianism, emphasize harmony of the family and the community. Lee also states that, due to Confucianism, Koreans develop communally and also share communal values.<sup>167</sup> Korean American women are embedded in the cultural value that is communal, emphasizing community, relationships, and interdependence. This emphasis on the communal aspect is closely related to RCT's understanding of development, which claims that women grow in connection in relationships. However, Choi points out that male-oriented psychology has viewed interdependence of a minority woman as exhibiting lack of confidence and determination. She also notes that racism has also fed this tendency to see women's interdependence as a permanent psychological failure. Thus, Choi argues that when understanding minority women, consideration needs to be given to the effects of racism and sexism. RCT also is opposing the traditional male-centered psychological understanding that emphasizes independence and self-sufficiency. RCT points out that psychological independence does not necessarily imply psychological immaturity.

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<sup>166</sup> Choi Hee An, Korean Women and God: Experiencing God in a Multi-religious Colonial Context (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 137.

<sup>167</sup> Lee, 343.

While acknowledging that Korean communal culture as it relates to RCT's theory of growth-in-relation is important in understanding Korean American divorced women's experience, I argue that the balance between the individual and communal aspect be respected. The strength of developing in relation and the harm of forced harmony must be distinguished. RCT asserts that women need connection in relationships for growth. However, for Korean American divorced women who are already embedded in communal values that bind her to stay in harmful relationships that label her as the wrongdoer, insisting that she focus on connection for development could be harmful. Korean American divorced women's need for discernment of what individual and communal aspects are empowering and growth-fostering must be understood and honored. Because Korean culture emphasizes community, relationships, and interdependence,<sup>168</sup> Korean American divorced women's development and post-divorce adjustment needs to take into consideration that there is also need for the balance between the individual and communal aspects.

Some practical suggestions for the church and clinicians regarding this section's discussion will be made. The church needs to be accustomed to listening to a variety of voices in order to prevent disconnection. The Korean American church puts too much emphasis on uniformity in both belief and behavior. This is derived out of the communality that Korean culture focuses on; however, such uniformity in the society and the church allows only a certain standardized type of person and family to feel included. According to this understanding, divorced women fail to meet the standard since they do not have a standardized family that consists of a husband and a wife. It is likely that they

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<sup>168</sup> Lee, 347.



feel excluded at times in the church which brings disconnection among relationships. Thus, to promote connection, the church needs to be open to accepting and acknowledging different voices and types of people that exist in the church. Clinicians need to focus on helping Korean American divorced clients find a balance between self-development and communalism, rather than being ambivalent. If marriage had required interdependence in the relationship, divorce may have required them to be more independent. For Korean American women who were embedded in the communal culture, this independence may be awkward and unsettling. Independence after divorce does not have to mean complete disconnection or total self-sufficiency. Clinicians need to understand and acknowledge that there is a yearning for connection as well as a need for autonomy.

#### Summary

This dissertation has called for Korean American churches and pastoral counselors to provide adequate care for Korean American divorced women by gaining more knowledge and understanding of their struggles. To this end, this study has provided an analysis of the experience of Korean American divorced women. By carefully studying the circumstances and contexts of first generation Korean American women who are legally divorced, an enhanced understanding for the church and pastoral counseling practitioners can be shaped. In particular, this chapter consisted of a summary of categories of empirical data and their interrelationship, leading to a grounded theory of Christian Korean American divorced women's experience. It also engaged in discussion of the findings from the three hermeneutical perspectives of pastoral theology, feminist/womanist pastoral theology, and RCT. Discussion of the findings from these

perspectives emphasized the context that is distinctive and sensitive to Korean American divorced women, attempting to develop an enhanced understanding of the experience and needs for care typical in this particular population.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This study has resulted in a theory of Korean American Christian women's post-divorce adjustment. Korean American divorced women face extensive and pervasive effects of divorce in their everyday lives. They are stereotyped and neglected in society, as well as the church. I adopted a qualitative method for this research in order to value subjectivity and to understand and interpret reasons of certain contexts through semi-structured research methods. The qualitative approach of grounded theory research was accomplished through analysis of data obtained through in-depth interviews. The interview data was analyzed and the findings were reported. I also adopted feminist and womanist pastoral theology and RCT for an enhanced analysis and interpretation of the data. This dissertation was done in order to develop a pastoral theological framework for pastoral care and counseling with divorced women in the Korean American church.

#### Summary of Chapters

In the introductory first chapter, the problem of care of divorced women in the Korean American Protestant church was presented. Also, the importance of providing a pastoral theological framework for the divorced women of the Korean American church was argued. A statement of the thesis, along with a brief overview of the method for the research, intended audiences, definition of the terms, and its scope and limitations were presented.

In the second chapter, a review of current literature on the subject was presented. The literature review included discussions of the morality of divorce and offered a pastoral theological perspective on the issue of divorce. The literature reviewed also

included an understanding of post-divorce adjustment issues in Korean American and Korean contexts using the frameworks of gender and culture. In addition, literature on single women was reviewed. In these reviews, the priority was given to examining the pastoral theological literature; however, due to the insufficient amount of literature on divorce from the pastoral theological perspective, literature from cognate fields was adopted when a significant work was called for.

The research design and methods were presented in Chapter 3. Grounded theory, as one of the inductive qualitative research methods, was used to collect and analyze the data. Thus this chapter presented a thorough description of grounded theory and discussed its relevance for this particular research. Data collection was done through in-depth interviews and the questions and specific procedures were explained, such as participant selection, the role of the participant, and guidelines for confidentiality and the protection of the participants. For data analysis, concepts of coding, categorizing, reaching saturation point, validity, and trustworthiness of the study were discussed. Other methods used for analysis, such as feminist and womanist pastoral theological frameworks, and RCT were discussed.

In Chapter 4, the results of the grounded study are presented. From the transcribed data, key points were marked with codes and grouped into similar concepts to be formed into categories. Categories that were derived out of codes from the raw data were: *Traditional Notions; Decision Making; Divorce and the Church; Biblical Understanding; Theological Understanding; Aloneness; Post-Divorce Issues*, and: *Positive Outcomes of Divorce*. Each category and its properties and sub-properties were supported with quotes from the transcribed and translated interview.

In chapter 5, the emerging theory, drawn from the categories generated from the in-depth interview data, was discussed. Implications of the research for the theory and practice of pastoral theology, care, and counseling were discussed in this chapter; i.e., what caregivers and the church need to know and be aware of when providing pastoral care and counseling to the Korean American divorced women.

#### Limitations of the Study

There several limits to this study. Mostly, this study employed a qualitative research method. There are limits in generalizing the findings since the results may be unique to a certain Korean American divorced population. Thus, no quantitative predictions can be made. Next, there are limits to the context of this research. The research was done with Christian Korean American divorced women, but the geographical location had its limits since it was carried on only within the area of Southern California. There is a large Korean American community and many churches in this area, but only eleven churches and fifteen divorced women out of it were selected for this study. Lastly, the interviews were conducted with a random sample of participants who are Korean American divorced women. More consideration could have been given to the demographics of the participant selection, in regards to their age, and years of marriage, divorce, immigration, and Christian belief. More careful establishment of a representative sample may have led to more coherent research findings.

#### Originality and Contributions

Studies on divorced women have generally received little attention, not only in the field of pastoral theology, but also within Korean American churches. The research on

divorced women in Korean American churches is significantly lacking. Very little literature exists related to Korean American Christian women's divorce in the fields of theology, pastoral theology, feminist pastoral theology, and in the cognate fields. Therefore, this dissertation will serve to provide a pastoral theological framework by which Korean American Christian divorced women can be better understood and provided care.

### Suggestions for Further Research

This study has focused on divorce of first generation Korean American Protestant Christian women. There were valuable findings in the study of this specific population; however, suggestions for the further research could be made in order to enhance the issue of divorce among Korean Americans.

First, the study could be directed towards Korean American divorced women's recovery according to whether they have the custody of children or not. Among the interviewees of my research, only one interviewee did not have the custody of her children. This interviewee has reported an extensive amount of the pain of divorce. Although the relationship between her pain of divorce and the custody of her children has not been within the scope of research for this study, this could be a future research area.

Second, the study of Korean Americans' divorce needs to be developed overall. Only a small amount of research exists thus far. Contributions to the study can be made by comparative research between the first and second generation of Korean Americans' divorce. The issue of immigration was, for my research, closely tied to the post-divorce adjustment of first generation Korean American women. Second generation Korean

American women, who supposedly have made a relatively better life adjustment in the United States, can also be studied for the two population groups to be compared.

Third, a comparison between Korean American divorced women and men can be made for future research. Confucianism and patriarchy was pointed out in my research as a major factor that affects Korean American divorced women's post-divorce adjustment. Further study can focus on comparing the two groups of Korean American divorced women and men to seek how Confucianism and patriarchy differently affects these groups' recovery after divorce.

## Appendix A

## CONSENT DOCUMENT

Researcher: Pooreum Clara Chung

Understanding and Agreement for Research Participants

I have been invited to participate in a project studying divorced women in Korean American churches. The purpose of this project is to better understand the experience of divorced women in the Korean American church, regarding the themes of forgiveness and solitude. The result of this study will help to enhance the pastors' and the church's understanding of divorced women's lives.

Giving my permission means that I will be interviewed by the researcher. The interview will take place at my church, one time, for approximately 1-1/2 hours. The interview will be audiotaped. The audiotapes will be used only to write the notes from the interview. All the information from it will be kept confidential. No names will be used in the reports about the interview. The information from the interview will be kept safely with the researcher. The information will be destroyed upon the completion of the dissertation. Only the researcher will see the information from the interview. No individual information will be shared.

The only known risk of doing the interview is that painful memories may be shared. I may choose not to participate in this research study at any time. I may also choose not to answer the questions. In the interview, I can talk as much or as little as I feel comfortable.

I understand that I will not be paid for participating in this research. However, should the need to talk to a counselor arise because of the feelings that arose from the interview, the researcher will provide up to two 1-hour sessions at no cost. If more are needed, the researcher will provide me with a referral.

If I have any questions or concerns about this project, I may contact the researcher at 951/251-1841. I may also contact her academic advisor, Dr. Kathleen Greider, at the Claremont School of Theology at 909/447-2540 with any questions.

I have read, understood, and agree to the terms of this document, and have received a copy of it.

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Name (Printed)

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Signature

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Date



Appendix B  
List of Categories and Properties

Category	Property	Sub-Property
<b>Aloneness</b>		
	Loneliness	
		Connections
		A Role in Need
		Wrong Perception
	Solitude	
<b>Biblical Understanding</b>		
	1 Corinthians 7-26	
	Discomfort with Scriptures	
	Matthew 19-6	
	Proverbs 21-19	
	Romans 5	
	Story of Ruth	
<b>Theological Understanding</b>		
	Cross to Bear	
	Divorce as Punishment	
	Keeping Marriage for Religious Beliefs	
	Understanding of God and Divorce	
<b>Divorce and the Church</b>		
	Comments for the Future Church	
		Focus on Strengthening Faith
		Honoring Divorcees' Time
		Provide Support
		No Special Attention Wanted
		Sensitive to the Single Families
	Divorcees' Attitude within the Church	
		Afraid of Criticism
		Hesitance in Opening Up
		Low Expectations for the Church
		Narrow Choice in Choosing Church
		The Least Considerate Place

		of Divorcees
	<b>Ministry Focus</b>	
		Disadvantage of Singles
		Focus on the Couples
		Male Focused Ministry and Service Opportunity
		Outward Focus
		Single Women's Group
	<b>Pastoral Support or Insensitivity</b>	
		Inability of Counseling
		Support and Validation from the Pastor
		Disadvantage of Service due to Single Status
		Ignorant in Caring for Divorcees
		Pastor's Support
		Lack of Pastoral Support
		Disregarding Divorcees' Opinion
		Confidentiality
		Support and Validation from the Pastor
	<b>Perception Towards Divorcees</b>	
		Unbiased Church
		Biased Church
		Stereotyping
		Comparison with Other Singles
<b>Decision Making</b>		
	<b>Confidence in Decision</b>	
	<b>Divorce for Survival</b>	
	<b>Regarding Regrets</b>	
		Still Questioning the Decision
	<b>Hesitancy in Decision</b>	
		Divorce and Sacrifice
		Hesitance due to Children
		Limits of Endurance
		Thoroughly Thought Over
<b>Forgiveness</b>		
	<b>Forgiveness After Divorce</b>	
		Forgiveness Granted

		Difficult to Forgive
		God's Realm
	Reaching Forgiveness	
		Through Faith
		Appreciation
		Releasing Anger
		Realizing My Own Fault
		Forgiving Yourself First
		Experiencing Other Stories
		New Relationship
	After Forgiveness	
		Being at Peace
		Repeated Anger
		Forgiveness is Not Reconciliation
Positive Outcomes of Divorce		
	Freedom	
	Gaining Perspective	
	Recognizing the Positives	
Post-Divorce Issues		
	Financial Stability	
	Pervasive Pain	
	Psychological Issues	
	Social Status	
Traditional Notions		
	Traditional Notions Embedded	
		Unlucky Fate
		Traditional Role of Wife
	Marriage	
		Notion of Marriage
		In-law's reaction to divorce
		Blaming Wife for Divorce

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